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"NOW, SIR, ASK MY PARDON!" CRIED THE DAUNTLESS RUTH.

OR, The Rivals in Buckskin.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.
AUTHOR OF "THE RED SOMBRERO RANGERS,"
"BLUE JACKET BILL," "THE SCARLET
SOMBRERO," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE STRANGER.

A MAN was riding slowly along over a Texas prairie, one pleasant afternoon, a score of years ago, seemingly with no dread of danger, though he could not but know that he was in the country of hostile Indians, and might, at any moment, come upon a band of Comanches, who would be only too glad to get a chance to take his scalp.

Perhaps it was that he felt no fear because he was so splendidly mounted, his horse showing power and speed enough to run away from any Indian pony upon the plains.

Perhaps, too, it was the confidence of the rider in himself, for he had the look of one who was utterly fearless.

He was dressed in corduroys, top-boots, slouch hat, and besides a sporting-rifle lying across his saddle had a belt of arms that appeared to be of the best manufacture and ready for service.

His form was tall and sinewy, he sat in his saddle with the air of a perfect horseman, and his face was strangely handsome and indicative of courage and recklessness commingled.

It was a face that a woman might love, a man would fear, and a child would shun, for the eyes of childhood often see beneath the mask that men wear to hide their true natures.

Yet it was an attractive face, one to command attention in any assemblage, and one to regard with more than ordinary interest, the beholder feeling that the man was one who had a history, and a mysterious one at that.

The prairie was rolling, broken here and there with a timber island, bill and stream, for the trail he had come was over an unbroken level plain.

Suddenly he halted, placed his hand to his ear and listened.

"Ah! there is trouble yonder."

"The train I am trailing has gotten corraled by red-skins sure."

"Well, I must help them out, that is all."

The horseman spoke aloud, and with a stroke of his reins his splendid horse dashed forward at a run.

As he sped along the sound of firing became more and more distinct, and after a ride of a mile, as he neared a ridge, the horseman drew rein.

"Wait here, Tramp, while I reconnoiter," he said, as he dismounted and left his horse standing not far from the rise.

Then he unslung his rifle, crept to the top and peered over.

The sight he beheld was a striking and a thrilling one.

There in the trail, just where it crossed a creek, were an ambulance and half a dozen wagons, of the "prairie schooner" style, formed in a circle, with the horses and cattle in the open space which the vehicles protected in a manner, and kept in a close corral.

Under the wagons, protected by the wheels, saddles and rolls of blankets were the men of the little train, defending themselves against some thirty Comanches in war-paint, and who kept riding in a circle around them, which they narrowed at each round.

It was a case of half a dozen men fighting six to one, and that they were not throwing their shots away was shown by the dead bodies of a couple of Indians and several ponies.

The strange horseman took in the situation at a glance, and seemed not in the least ruffled at what he beheld.

"There are a goodly number of red-skins, but I must risk it," he said, coolly.

"Yes, they are narrowing their circle and will charge in upon the train within ten minutes, and that ends it."

"I will take the chances of stampeding them."

He brought his rifle round, quietly picked out his warriors, and then rung out the shots rapidly and fatally.

One! two! three! were fired, and then after a pause came four, five and six, while from his lips broke a wild, ringing war-cry, which he cleverly answered with several apparent responses as from a distance.

"Come, Tramp!"

The obedient horse dashed up to his side, and throwing himself into the saddle, the plucky stranger darted over the rise, waving his hat and shouting as he did so, as if to others behind him:

"Come, boys, come!"

His shots had brought down two warriors, and twice as many ponies, and at once the effect had been to stampede the Comanches toward the other side, while the defenders of the train gaining hope and renewed courage, darted out from their shelter, and opened heavily upon the retreating Indians.

The horseman, meanwhile, only rode a short distance toward the Comanches, then wheeled and dashed back to the ridge, yelling and waving his hat for a minute, when with an exultant war-cry he again darted toward the retreating Indians, as though help was close at hand, shouting as he neared the wagons:

"I am alone! mount your horses to pursue, and keep them going!"

CHAPTER II.

WON BY PLUCK.

JUST as despair began to seize upon the defenders of the train, and it seemed that it must be a fight to the death for the men, a massacre for the women and children, the shots of the stranger's rifle had rung out over the rise, and his bold act had set the Comanches in full retreat.

Once they had gotten started, and were making down a prairie valley, they kept ahead with all the speed possible, bearing with them their wounded.

The trainmen promptly obeyed the command of the stranger, to mount and give at least a show of pursuit, and their ringing cries of triumph, mingled with the shouts of the women and children, reached the ears of the Comanches, and set them going the faster, as they feared their most dreaded foes, the Texas Rangers, were upon their track.

"Come, men, we must make a dash to keep them going!" cried the strange horseman, and with a cheer the men of the train followed his lead in pursuit of the red-skins, their rifles rattling away at long range.

That one man's pluck had won the fight, the Comanches could not believe, as they went off at a pace that showed they were terrified, while, had they known the truth, they would have rallied and again had the people of the train in their power.

The moment he felt that the Comanches meant to make no stand, the stranger said:

"Now, half of you go back, get the train started, and push on for the cliffs, where you can fight off, if need be, ten to one."

"I will still let the Comanches believe they are being pursued, and three men are enough to remain with me."

They obeyed without a word, and half an hour after he sent the other three men to join their comrades, remarking:

"I will head you off before you reach the cliffs."

Fortunately, the people of the train had suffered but little, only a few wounds having been received, and those slight ones.

Here and there a horse had been killed; but all congratulated themselves upon their escape, and knew that it was owing to the pluck of the single horseman.

They started the train in motion, pulling out for the cliffs, some miles distant, a wooded ridge well watered, and a safe camping-place, which the stranger told them lay in their way, for their guide had been absent since early morning.

They pushed rapidly on, and soon came in sight of the heavily-timbered bluff overhanging a stream, and along which the trail lay.

But ahead of them they saw a horseman, who at first they believed to be their guide, until a feminine voice called out:

"It is the handsome stranger who saved us from being slain!"

The speaker was mounted upon a roan mare, and sat her horse like one accustomed to the saddle.

Her form was tall, slender, willowy, and her face one of rare beauty.

It was a face bearing the imprint of a nature as daring as a man's, though it was not masculine by any means.

She was dressed in a gray home-print habit, wore a man's sombrero, and in the belt about her slender waist was a revolver and hunting-knife, while at her saddle horn hung a repeating rifle.

Ruth Redmond had been born in a Texan fort, where her father was a captain in the army, and she had been reared until her fourteenth year upon the prairies, so she knew all that there was in a wild frontier life.

Then her mother had been slain, while visiting a ranch near the fort, by Indian raiders, and Ruth's father had sent her to his brother then dwelling in Alabama, where she had an opportunity of receiving a good education.

Two years after Captain Redmond was slain in a fight with the Comanches, and he left his ranch to his only child, with all its belongings, with a sum of money to his brother to come out and dwell there, improving the place all he could and having a half interest in it until Ruth was twenty-one years of age.

Mr. Redmond was not in prosperous circumstances, and after a consultation with his wife and Ruth, they decided to go, and joining a small train of emigrants on their way, they were within a couple of days' journey of their future home when corraled by the Comanches from which the pluck of one man had saved them.

And that one man they had met before, back in one of the frontier towns.

They had seen him in a revolver duel, in which he had been attacked by three men, and he had killed the trio.

There, from their camp they had seen him mount his horse and quietly ride away.

They had been told that his name was Richard Drummond, a gambler, but more commonly called "Devil Dick," and all who knew him in the train never forgot his calm, handsome, daring face, as he stood up and facing odds dealt death at every shot of his deadly revolver.

And it was the next day that Dick Drummond again crossed the trail of the train, and in a manner that rendered each and every one of them his debtor for life.

CHAPTER III.

THE GUIDE.

THERE were in the wagon-train some score of people, Mr. Redmond, his wife and niece, whom they had adopted as their daughter, and two emigrants with their families.

With Mr. Redmond were two negroes, who had been in the family since slavery days, and his belongings were an ambulance, two-horse spring wagon and a couple of saddle-horses.

The rest of the outfit belonged to the two emigrants, who were brothers, going to seek a home in the Lone Star State.

The guide was a man whom the emigrants had engaged to take them to their destination, and he was a hunter and scout besides, having thus far done his duty well.

That he should be gone from the train for half a day was nothing remarkable, as he was wont to do this quite often, simply directing the course that they were to take.

Now the horseman seen on the trail ahead was not the guide, as had at first been supposed, but the stranger, the man whom they had seen in the duel with three men, and whom they had heard was a gambler, a wild, mysterious fellow whom no one knew much about, but who was generally dreaded.

He sat upon his horse awaiting their coming, and waved to them to hasten on, which they did.

As they came near he asked:

"Who is captain here?"

Mr. Redmond stepped forward, for he had been made leader when joining the train.

"Well, sir, you must get into camp as soon as possible and be ready to stand off the Indians who may again attack you to-night."

"You fear that they will?"

"They fled, believing that I had a force to back me; but when they learn your reinforcements consisted of one man, they will surely pursue you."

"But will they learn the fact?"

"Yes, sir."

"But how?"

"From the same source that they learned of your coming and strength, or rather weakness."

"Then you think it was not an accidental meeting with a roving band of Comanches?"

"I am sure that it was not, sir."

"You surprise me."

"You would not be surprised if you knew your guide as I do."

"Our guide?" and all seemed startled.

"Yes, Luke Harber, or Lasso Luke, as he is better known."

"Yes, that is his name, sir; but do you doubt his honesty?"

"No, I know that he is a scoundrel," was the cool response.

"We have found him thoroughly to be relied upon."

"Yes, in the sight of the law every man is innocent until proven guilty."

"But where is Harber now?"

"He went ahead of us this morning, and we have not seen him since."

"Yes he went ahead of you to arrange his plan for you to be wiped out, for he is friendly with the Comanches."

"Some one in the train has angered him."

"Oh, sir, I cannot believe that of him, though we have every reason for trusting you in all things after all you have done for us," said Mr. Redmond, and it was very evident that in spite of the services of the gallant stranger there were few who would believe his assertions against the guide.

"You have every reason to doubt me, sir, for you have only the word of Lasso Luke as to who and what I am."

"I was involved in a quarrel back in the camps, in full view of you all, and Lasso Luke gave you his story of who and what I was."

"I learned afterwards that Lasso Luke was your guide, for he always kept close in the camps where he was likely to be recognized as

your guide, and I at once followed on your trail to denounce him.

"I arrived after he had sprung his trap, but fortunately the Comanches weakened.

"Between Lasso Luke and me there is a debt to settle, and when he returns, it will be squared, for I charge him before you all with treachery."

"Still I cannot believe it."

"Has he had no quarrel with any one in this train?"

"Not with a soul."

"Well, I know that he is playing you false, for I happened to hear so from his pard, who was dying of a wound last night and confessed to me what Lasso Luke was up to.

"He said that Lasso Luke had some reason for wiping out the train."

"Still I must doubt you, sir, though I believe you are honest in all you say as far as your belief of his treachery is concerned."

"Perhaps, sir, I can add some weight to your words."

It was Ruth Redmond who spoke, and all eyes turned upon her quickly.

"My child, what can you possibly know against our guide?" asked Mr. Redmond.

"I only know, father, that in the month that Luke Harber has been our guide, he has persecuted me with protestations of his love, and three nights ago, when I refused to have aught more to say to him, he threatened to force me to become his wife, no matter what the cost of human life.

"Such were his exact words.

"At first, when we were on the way, being a good shot, I rode with him in search of game, as you know, and then you will recall that I began to go alone, and it was his conduct toward me that was the cause.

"That he would be so vile, so treacherous as to entrap us, I did not for a moment believe; but now I have perfect faith in the charges against him," and the frankly spoken words of Ruth Redmond made a profound impression upon all who heard them, and placed the guide in a most unenviable light.

CHAPTER IV. THE RETURN.

THE train had now reached the camping place, to which the stranger had guided them.

It was a plateau upon the side of a cliff, the top of which could not be reached, so that no foe could fire on them from above.

Springs trickled out of the cliffs, grass was plentiful, and thick timber shaded the camp, which could be very easily defended even from a superior force.

But still the stranger was determined to leave nothing undone to protect the people still more from attack.

Trees were felled as barriers, as soon as the cattle were staked out to feed until night-fall, and all arrangements were made for a fight if it came.

When night drew near the stranger said to Mr. Redmond:

"Your guide is coming, sir, and he must not know now of my presence here.

"At the proper time I will be on hand.

"Simply tell him that a stranger arrived, to the rescue, and then went his way, for I leave you now."

He refused to listen to urgings to remain and mounting his horse rode away down the hill, just as the guide appeared following their trail and already within half a mile of the camp.

The sun was almost upon the horizon when Lasso Luke rode into the camp.

The fact that he had started out ahead of them in the morning and came into camp on their trail in the evening did not seem to strike any of them, unused to border life, except one.

That one was Ruth Redmond, and she said:

"Father, how is it that he strikes our trail, instead of waiting for us, as would have been the case had he been ahead of us, for, had we not been corralled by the Indians for several hours, our camp would have been miles further on than this spot?"

Mr. Redmond made no reply, but he could not but see the force of Ruth's reasoning, and just then the guide rode up with the words:

"Well, friends, we have had a hard time of it, but I am glad it was no worse to you, or to me."

He was a large man, clad in buckskin leggings and hunting-shirt, a woolen shirt and a black neck-scarf.

He wore a sombrero, top-boots, and had the air of one who thought a great deal of his personal appearance.

If good or evil, he had a face that was a perfect mask, for it did not reveal what he was.

Without being handsome, he was yet an attractive-looking man, and his manners were not rough, but courtly.

He was well-mounted, thoroughly armed, and his face was bronzed as though from long exposure in the life he led.

"What has been the trouble with you, Harber?" asked Mr. Redmond, in responding to the words of the guide.

"Oh! I rode into a trap and got taken prisoner by the red-skins, and then they went off to attack you, leaving me with a guard of three braves."

"I am pretty good at unraveling knots, so freed myself, got my grip upon a revolver from my belt, lying near me, and one of the three braves, who was cooking dinner, never knew what struck him."

"I winged another, and the third hunted cover; but I lost no time in getting upon my horse and departing, leaving the camp to him."

"I struck out for the trail to find what the Indians had done, and I saw them retreating, so came to the conclusion you must have stood them off, or some one had come to your aid."

"You were right, Harber, a man did come to our aid."

"One man?"

"Yes."

"And one man stampeded those thirty red-skins?"

"He did, and just in time to save us from death."

"Where is he?"

"Gone on his way, after bringing us here to camp."

"Who is he?"

"He did not tell us his name."

"Well, he's a dandy, and for one man to do what he did, I guess I can call the turn on him."

"How do you mean?"

"It was either Buckskin Sam or Texas Jack, for those two are about the only ones I believe could, single-handed, stampede a band of Comanches."

"He did not tell us his name; but, come, supper is ready, and I guess you are hungry after your long fast."

"I congratulate Mr. Harber upon his wonderful escape," said Ruth quietly, and the guide looked quickly at her.

But he saw no evidence of satire in her quiet face.

Darkness had now fallen and the guide said that their camp was a perfect Gibraltar, that there was no danger of the Comanches following them, as he had trailed them far upon their retreat, after seeing that they had not captured the train and that he alone would stand guard.

"I think others of us had better aid you," Mr. Redmond said.

"No indeed, for I shall take up my position down in the prairie and run back and give warning of any danger, though I feel sure there will be none."

In vain did Mr. Redmond and others volunteer to accompany him; he refused their services, and was lighting his pipe to depart to his post, when, from out of the shadows, a dark object flew through the air, settled over the head and arms of the guide, and he was dragged back with a heavy fall to the ground by a sudden and hard pull on the lasso which had coiled about him.

CHAPTER V. SETTING A TRAP.

HARDLY had the form of the guide been dragged to the ground, with a shock that was temporarily stunning, than there bounded over a fallen tree none other than the stranger, known as Richard Drummond.

He held a revolver at the head of the guide, and said in a perfectly unmoved tone:

"You are my prisoner, Lasso Dick, until to-morrow morning."

"Resist, and I will kill you."

"Who are you?" hissed the guide, though the muzzle of the revolver in his face caused him to remain perfectly quiet.

"Oh! you know me, Lasso Luke, or did two days ago, when you gave my back history to the people of this train."

"I saved the train from the red-skins, and I accuse you of laying the trap for them."

"Now, I am a man to stand by my word, and I have just this much to say to you in the presence of all here:

"You are to be bound to-night and held as a prisoner."

"If the Comanches attack, well and good, and I know that they will, for you have planned to have them do so, and this I intend to prove."

"At any event, when we are ready to move

to-morrow, for I shall guide the train on to its destination, I shall release you and give you all the satisfaction you demand."

"Do you understand?"

"I do, and I shall demand your life for your action this night."

"So be it, and it is yours if you can get it; but now I am master, and you shall do as I say."

He unbuckled the belt of arms from the guide's waist, felt for other weapons, and then bound and gagged him with a skill that evidenced practice in the clever work of securing a prisoner.

The people of the train looked on in silence and wonder.

Here was a quarrel between their trusted guide, who had not been with them in their direst need, and a man who had saved them from death.

This same man, too, made charges against their guide, and boldly made him a prisoner in their camp. There were some of the train ready to resent the act, but Mr. Redmond said, in his quiet way:

"It is a quarrel between the two men with which we have nothing to do, friends."

"If Harber is guilty, then we have escaped death by the pluck of his accuser."

"If he is innocent, then the morrow will tell."

"Wait and see, for I lean toward the side of the stranger."

"Now, Mr. Redmond, I have just this to say:

"I believe I can rig up to look like Lasso Luke there, and I will go out on duty on the prairie and stand watch, as he intended doing!"

"That he had a motive for so doing I feel sure, and I can discover it, for I speak the Comanche tongue as well as he does."

"You, or any one else you care to appoint can go and keep near me, and note the result."

"Then I am sure we can arrange to catch the red foxes in a trap they little suspect."

"You think then the Indians are going to attack us, sir?"

"I am sure of it."

"May I ask your reasons?"

"Well, this guide of yours set the other trap, for his story is false about being captured."

"When, from a long way off he saw the defeat of his plans, he plotted with the Indians to follow and strike again."

"He then followed on your trail to see what reinforcements you had received, and finding out that one man only had arrived, and that you were encamped in this strong position, he was to go out alone and stand guard."

"This meant that he was to meet the red-skins, lead them quietly to the attack, and the train would fall into his hands."

"If I am wrong then he goes free to-morrow, and I answer to him as he deems it his pleasure to demand satisfaction."

"Now who goes with me?"

"I will ask Mr. Harris to go."

The emigrant named was called, the situation made known to him and he volunteered to accompany the stranger on his duty of standing guard.

So the two left the camp on foot, after the stranger had told Mr. Redmond to place the children in safety, have the ladies near to load the weapons, and to have every rifle and revolver ready.

"There, Pard Harris, you had best lie here in hiding, while I go on a hundred feet or so."

"Watch and see if I do not receive a visitor before midnight."

With this the stranger glided forward upon the prairie and took his stand.

The emigrant had thrown his blanket down upon the prairie and stretched himself upon it, though with no intention to sleep.

He was a brave man and knew that the lives of all dear to him were in the camp a couple of hundred yards away.

Then, too, all his worldly goods were in that same camp, and somehow he began to feel confidence in the strange man who had come to their aid, while his brother was friendly toward the guide.

So he remained on watch, observing in the starlight, the form of the stranger pacing to and fro like a sentinel on his post.

And as he watched he saw the sentinel halt, raise his hand above his head and then advance toward a dark object that suddenly arose from the prairie before him.

CHAPTER VI.

A FAIR VOLUNTEER.

THAT the dark object that suddenly appeared before the stranger upon the prairie, was a human form, Tom Harris saw.

It could be no other than an Indian he felt sure.

The two forms met and stood talking together for what seemed to the emigrant who was watching them a very long while.

He began to have fears that the stranger was a traitor, that the guide after all was innocent, and he dreaded the greatest evil.

He was almost tempted to raise his rifle, send a bullet through each man, and then flying for the camp aid the others in defending it as best they could.

But he did not yield to this fear, and waited, though he was becoming desperately nervous in doing so.

At last he saw the two forms part, for one glided back over the prairie and disappeared.

The other still remained stationary.

But not for long, as it turned and advanced toward him.

Dropping down upon the blanket by his side he said:

"Did you see?"

"I saw a form join you."

"Yes, and that he remained some time?"

"Yes."

"It was an Indian."

"A Comanche?"

"Yes."

"I could not tell at this distance in the darkness."

"It was the warrior sent to meet your guide, and he believed that I was the man."

"I saw him off on the prairie when he dismounted from his pony and came on foot."

"I raised my hands in token of friendship, and as he advanced spoke to him in the Comanche tongue."

"It is just as I said, your guide is a traitor."

"He has led other trains to their destruction, and this time intended to take Miss Redmond as his prize, for I got all out of the red-skin I could as he suspected me of being Lasso Luke."

"I think from what I gleaned that he intended to pretend to rescue Miss Redmond from the Comanches, thus gaining a claim upon her regard."

"Now there are out upon the prairie just twenty-seven red-skins, and Lasso Luke was to meet them and have all ready for their attack."

"I told this brave to go back and bring his warriors up on horseback to the creek, and there leave their ponies, while they came afoot to attack by the other side, and they could rush without trouble or resistance into the camp, as I would display a lantern when they were to make the charge."

"Now you go back and tell the situation to all as it is, and I will be on hand to capture their ponies the moment they cross the stream and leave them."

"I will lead the ponies down to the timber below, so that when beaten back the Comanches will be on foot, and not be able to find their horses."

"When I have hidden the ponies, I will come into camp, place all ready to defend the position at the point of advance, and then show the light."

"If we do not kill half of them at the first fire it will surprise me, and the way they will advance leaves no retreat except to run back down the hill under full fire."

"Do you understand the situation, Mr. Harris?"

"Perfectly, and I humbly crave your pardon for any suspicion I held against you."

"That man Harber does indeed need hanging," and Thomas Harris held out his hand which Dick Drummond warmly grasped, while he replied:

"Oh, leave Lasso Luke to me, for I shall take care of him."

Then Harris returned to the camp and made known what had occurred; but, with the inconsistency of human nature, his brother still held faith in the guide, and vowed that the stranger was plotting against them.

He really seemed anxious to release the guide and still seek his instructions as to what was best to be done.

But in this he was overruled, and all awaited the coming of the stranger, though not a man or youth was there in the camp who was not on watch.

Fully two hours passed away and the suspense was becoming almost unbearable, when suddenly the tall form of the stranger appeared in the camp.

"You keep bad watch, for not a soul saw me," he said, quietly.

"I admit it, sir, though we were all upon the alert."

"Yes, Mr. Redmond, but a man must keep eyes and ears well open on this frontier."

"Now, there are nearly thirty Indians within an eighth of a mile of your camp, down yonder in the timber, waiting a signal from me to advance."

"They left their ponies by the ford we crossed in coming here, and I captured the whole outfit, though I had to shoot with an arrow the guard they left with them."

"I half suspected they would leave one brave with the ponies, so was on the lookout for him, and all the ponies were tied together, so as to be brought to a given point when needed."

"I took them to a place where the red-skins cannot find them, and so when beaten back they will be afoot; and take a Comanche's horse away from him and he is no more use than a squaw."

"Now, they are to come to the attack in this direction, and I wish to place you all for the volley that must wipe them out, but not a soul must fire until I give the word."

"I, too, shall be among those who fire," said Ruth Redmond, calmly.

"Yes, Miss Redmond, for we need every rifle for the first volley, and if your mother and the other ladies will also volunteer, I will esteem it a favor, for this is a case of life and death for all," and instantly the other brave women of the train stepped forward to lend their services in the good cause.

CHAPTER VII.

SPRINGING THE TRAP.

THE brave act of Ruth Redmond in volunteering in the defense, so quickly followed by Mrs. Redmond and three others able to bear rifles, added five more weapons to the first volley to be poured upon the Indians in their advance.

These made, altogether, with the stranger's aid, fifteen shots that would be in the first fire.

Then the women were to drop down to shelter and reload the weapons, while the extra guns would be fired by the men, and the firing thus be kept up steadily.

There were several double-barrel shot-guns in the camp, so that these, loaded with bullets; would do deadly work, the stranger knew, and he placed them in the hands of Mr. Thomas Harris and his two sons, to be fired immediately after the first volley.

He went over the instructions to all most coolly, and then was particularly urgent in instructing them not to fire until he gave the word.

"And then all of you will be able to see just where the red-skins are, as they cannot hide coming up that trail, so do not throw a shot away."

"A single shot fired prematurely will destroy the effect of the volley, and perhaps lose us the battle, so again I urge you one and all to await for orders."

Having placed all in position, and shown the women where to seek shelter after the first volley, the stranger took a lantern given him by Mr. Redmond and lighted it.

Then he stepped out in front of the barrier where the defenders were posted, and drawing off the blanket, revealed the lantern, so that its rays could be seen in the timber down the stream.

He so placed it upon the ground, some thirty feet away from the barrier, that its light could be seen from those ascending the trail, but not from the camp.

Still, its reflection shining down the trail, would bring into view the red-skins when they came within the distance its rays penetrated.

Returning inside of the barrier he said:

"That will give us a view of the red-skins, and we can get our first fire in at less than fifty yards, and it must tell."

"Be calm all, for you need your nerves now, and not a shot must be fired until I give the command, and then every bullet must find a target in a Comanche."

"I think you will find us all worthy of our gallant captain, Mr. Drummond," said Ruth Redmond without the slightest sign of nervousness.

"If all are half as cool as you are, Miss Redmond, then there will be nothing to fear," was the reply.

"Well I have been under fire before, for I am a border-born girl, and I have my parents to avenge, for my own father and mother were killed by the Comanches."

"Indeed! then you must be the daughter of Captain Redmond of the army?" quickly said the stranger.

"I am, and at the death of my father, I was sent to my uncle and aunt in Alabama, and they adopted me as their daughter."

"Did you know my father, sir?"

"Yes, for we were friends, and I am glad to know his daughter— But listen!"

All ears were strained to catch the slightest sound, yet only the stranger's trained bearing seemed to note anything that could indicate the coming of the red-skins.

"They are coming!" he said in a low tone.

"Ready all, and be careful not to fire until I give the word."

Ruth Redmond was next to him and he saw that she was as cool as he was.

The line swayed a little at first, but soon quieted down, and then came the order:

"Ready all, for there they come!"

As the stranger spoke there appeared in sight a crouching form and it glided on toward the lantern and dropped his blanket over it.

"That was a cunning act," said Ruth.

"Yes, and we have not the advantage of the light; but there they come in a mass."

"Ready! aim well—fire!"

Just fifteen rifles flashed almost together, and as they did so the wild war-cry of the stranger rung out in defiance, while as he began to pump the bullets out of his repeating-rifle he called out:

"Women to shelter! Use your shot-guns now and keep up your firing!"

"Throw no shots away!"

The wild burst of yells, of mingled terror, hatred, fury and revenge were appalling, and it seemed for a moment that the infuriated savages meant to rush into the camp against all odds.

But the first volley had been a deadly one, dropping in their tracks, dead or wounded, ten warriors, and the repeating rifle of the stranger, and three shot-guns loaded with bullets following close upon the platoon discharge, caused the Comanches who had momentarily pushed on, to turn and fly in terror.

"That settles it, for they are whipped, and half their number is left behind them."

"Set your fires going now, and pick off any red-skin you see move yonder, for an Indian is dangerous until dead."

"I will go out and reconnoiter," and over the barrier in the other direction leaped the stranger and disappeared in the darkness.

But a moment after five fires blazed up brightly, illumining the approach to the camp on each side, and revealing the piled-up mass of Indians that had fallen at the first volley, and showing others scattered along the trail in their flight, who had been brought down by the repeating rifle of the stranger, or the shot-guns' deadly discharge.

Some of the Indians were seen to attempt to drag them away, but obedient to orders they were shot and the group of prostrate forms remained as silent as though not one of them there was alive.

The wildest yells came up from the timber, as the red-skins sought shelter there, and that they were completely demoralized was evident.

"Just wait until they find their ponies gone, and then you will hear savage music to discount what they are giving us now," said Ruth Redmond, well remembering her experience in her earlier girlhood upon the frontier.

The yells were kept up steadily until suddenly from a distant quarter burst forth wild cries of alarm.

They were instantly followed by two rapid shots, which caused Ruth Redmond to say:

"Those shots were fired by the stranger, who had gone to head off the braves sent after the ponies."

"See! there is silence now, and the Indians are rushing for their ponies, called by the warning cries of their comrades sent after them."

"Just wait until they find them gone!"

And all breathlessly waited, for Ruth's border experience caused her to be looked up to by all in the train over whom she had the advantage in that respect.

CHAPTER VIII.

OUTWITTED.

AFTER the warning cries, followed by the two shots, coming from over by the ford where the horses had been left, a silence rested in the valley along the stream.

All on the hillside awaited with breathless eagerness the next move.

The fires were kept burning brightly, and their glare extended in both directions from whence danger might be looked for, so that the red-skins could not creep upon them without being seen.

The daring man who had so well planned and executed, had disappeared, and the two shots seemed to indicate that he was still rendering good service.

That the Indians were silently on the run, over the mile of space that separated them from where

they had left their ponies, all believed, for Ruth Redmond had expressed it as her opinion that they were, and added:

"Just wait until they find their ponies gone!"

The group of silent forms, illumined by the firelight, were in full view, and the women shuddered as they glanced toward them.

That all felt anxiety regarding the stranger there was no doubt.

He had twice saved them, and now was on foot down in the valley where his foes were, and was it not possible that his daring would end in his death?

And as they talked, watched and waited, suddenly there came one long, loud, piercing cry.

It was from the spot where the ponies had been left.

"It is from the first warrior who has reached the spot," Ruth Redmond said, and with the utterance of her words came a flash and sharp report from the same direction.

There followed other sharp reports in rapid succession, until seven had been counted, and silence again reigned in the valley.

"That brave man is alone there, and doing his deadly work," cried Mr. Redmond.

But the silence was short-lived, as soon there burst forth from down by the ford a chorus of yells, demoniacal in their fury, as the Comanches in a body reached the spot where they had left their ponies, and found them gone.

The stranger had, upon leaving the camp, darted down the trail with the speed of a deer.

He had made his way straight to the ford, and taken up position there, to await the coming of the red-skins, who he felt sure, after their defeat, would retreat to where their horses were.

He had not waited long when two warriors came along at a run, the advance of the party, who were sent to bring the ponies to where the others were halted for consultation, as soon as they could cease yelling forth their fury.

Two shots rung out, and one of the horses staggered and fell, the other bounding back again on the trail he had come.

The position of the stranger was such that he could not reach the fallen brave without exposing himself to a shot, should he only be wounded.

So he reloaded his rifle and waited.

When the rest of the band came up, he would open fire, for this he knew would check them for awhile, and give him a good chance to escape.

Then, too, he might do more damage by his random firing, and every warrior killed or wounded lessened the danger to the train.

Could the Comanches have found their ponies he did not doubt but that they would gladly depart; but on foot they might yet make another attack, in their desperation at being dismounted.

So he waited until the party came along at a run, and then his rifle rattled forth its seven shots in quick succession.

Just as he had anticipated, the Comanches sprung for cover, and he darted away unseen, making for the shelter of the cliffs.

He ran rapidly and soon reached the spot where he had tied the ponies.

Springing upon one, so soon as he had untied them, he set them at a rush for the trail leading to the camp, just as the wild yells up at the ford told him that the band were fully convinced that their horses had been run off, and they found there the body of the Indian guard, and perhaps the wounded horse whom he had brought down.

It was this chorus of yells that broke upon the ears of those in the camp and told them how terrible was the fury of the Comanches.

"I have another chance to give them a scare and will do it," said Devil Dick, as he leaped into the saddle of the Indian poney which led the other animals.

"They will think it is cavalry, I hope, for I will give a bugle call as well as I can."

He then imitated a bugle call as well as he could, and which was good enough to deceive an unpracticed ear.

At the same time he gave an order in a loud voice, and set his horses in motion.

Around the cliff they went, their hoof-strokes sending forth many an echo as they fell upon the hard ground, and still keeping up his bugle calls he reached the trail, wheeled into it, and started for the camp.

The Comanches had heard the call and their yells had been instantly silenced, and then as the hoofs were heard coming around the cliff, they set off at a run for the heavy timber they had left a short while before.

But instead of cavalry dashing across the ford and going in pursuit, the Comanches soon

discovered that their own ponies had been used to frighten them, for the fire-light revealed the animals dashing up the trail to the train camp.

And this sight fairly frenzied the red-skins, for they felt how cleverly they had been outwitted by one man.

And in that man the firelight revealed their foe, who had rescued the train on the day before from them.

CHAPTER IX.

BEATEN OFF.

THE people in the camp heard the sudden cessation of the Comanches' yells, and wondered at the cause.

But in a minute more they heard the clatter of hoofs, the bugle calls, and all broke forth in a cheer, for they, too, believed the soldiers were coming to the rescue—all but one.

That one was Ruth Redmond, and she said: "That is no cavalry call, father, for a charge; only bugle notes, and poor ones at that."

Not a soul agreed with Ruth Redmond in this, but she was sure, for she had heard bugle calls from her girlhood, and knew every one, for her practiced ear noted the deception.

A moment more, and the single horseman and his ponies dashed into the glare of the firelight, and Ruth called out, triumphantly:

"I told you so!"

It was an instance in which the hackneyed assertion came in with exceeding truth, for she had "told them so."

Up to the barrier dashed the ponies; the stranger threw himself from the saddle, and the animals were led in among the fallen trees to the corral beyond.

Then came the order from the stranger, who raised his hat politely at the cheer that greeted him:

"Keep up the fires, for the darkness will linger yet an hour."

"I will also try and build a fire still further off on each side; but it must be done quickly, as those red-skins are desperate and will charge us again I feel sure."

The men seized logs and ran to the fires with them, and Mr. Redmond upon one side, the stranger upon the other, started another blaze a hundred feet down the trail.

They just had time to set them ablaze when the arrows began to fall quickly around them, forcing them to retreat.

The Comanches had now divided their forces and were approaching from each side where an attack could be made.

Had it not been for the renewal of the fires, they might have made a feint upon one side, a rush upon the other, and in the darkness reached the camp.

But the blazing logs kept them under cover. One brave dashed forward to desperately run the gambler and toss the blazing logs over the cliff to the creek below.

But a rifle cracked just as he reached the fire and springing high into the air he dropped into the midst of the burning logs.

A cry of horror went up from the train people at this, and was echoed by the terrible yells of the Indians, while Devil Dick coolly remarked as he reloaded his rifle:

"There is fire enough there to roast the whole band if they try that caper singly."

"But guard the other side, for we do not know from whence their charge will come."

"You think they will charge us then, sir?"

"Oh yes, for they are afoot, and desperate."

"We are upon a trail they dare not remain on until to-morrow night to get a chance at us in the darkness, and so they must act to-night."

"When they come they will be scattered, yet come on like deers, so be ready all!"

That the stranger knew them well was proven the moment after, when with wild yells a dozen warriors sprung into view down the trail on one side, and came on like deers.

Upon the other side only four were visible, and this showed their whole force and their desperation.

Rapidly rung out the rifles, and here and there a warrior dropped, but others pressed on.

But again more fell, and then even Comanche desperation could stand no more and they turned and fled, sending back showers of arrows as they did so.

Devil Dick received a slight wound in the arm, Mr. Redmond was struck in the head, and several others were more or less hurt, while the horses suffered considerably.

But the Comanches were again beaten back, and as Devil Dick drew the arrow from his arm he said:

"That ends it, for they'll take advantage of

what darkness remains to them, to get as far away as possible.

"If I had half a dozen men to lead after them I could send every member of that band to the happy hunting-grounds."

"But let them go."

"Yes, for they have lost over half their warriors as it is, and we could not spare any one to go in pursuit," Mr. Redmond said.

"No, indeed, sir, you need all your force here, and at sunrise must be on the march to get beyond the danger of meeting another prowling band."

The people now gathered around Devil Dick and he fairly blushed under the praises of his courage and the expressions of gratitude showered upon him, and replied with considerable embarrassment:

"Why you are harder to fight off than the red-skins; but I just wish to say I did my duty as I saw it, and I will keep my word to Lasso Luke your traitor guide."

"He was playing a bold and cruel game, as you can all now understand; but I told him I would give him a chance to get satisfaction from me and I will, so, Mr. Redmond, just come with me to the wagon yonder and we'll set him free, so that he can limber up his arms, which must be cramped from being bound so long."

"Then, before the train pulls out, I'll fight him as I said I would."

CHAPTER X.

MISTAKEN KINDNESS.

"You surely do not intend to keep your promise made to that traitor guide of ours, to give him satisfaction," said Mr. Redmond as the stranger started toward the wagon where the prisoner had been placed.

"I surely do, sir, for I am one who never breaks a pledge to friend or foe."

"I said that he was a traitor, and I have proven my charge against him."

"But then I promised to fight him a duel this morning and I will do so."

"You are wrong, Mr. Drummond, to thus risk your life in facing that man!" said Ruth Redmond earnestly.

"I have not a soul to hold a claim upon me, Miss Redmond, for I am all alone in the world, homeless and a wanderer."

"I am a Texan now, and a gambler, who lives up to the lawless code of the frontier."

"I have given my promise to Lasso Luke and shall keep it."

"If I fall, I warn you to make him leave your camp, and watch for him night and day."

"From here on, the trail is a broad one and you can follow it, for I shall draw a map of your way for you."

"Thank you, but I know the way from here, as often have I been by these cliffs when my father was stationed at the fort," said Ruth.

"See if I am not right, sir, for Fort Bond lies twenty miles away just north, and the Big Crossing is twenty miles due west from here, with Old Mission Miguel south."

"You are perfectly right, Miss Redmond, and I am glad to feel that should I fall by the hand of Lasso Luke, the train will be under your skillful guidance, for you are a thorough border girl."

"But see, dawn is upon us, and I will give Lasso Luke a chance to be free of his bonds some time before the duel, as I do not care to take an unfair advantage of him."

With this Devil Dick walked over to where the wagons were, accompanied by Mr. Redmond, and threw up the flap.

"Well, Lasso Luke, we beat off your allies, and now I have come to— Great God! the man is gone!"

All heard the loud cry and rushed to the wagon.

There lay the lariat, severed in half a dozen pieces, and cut with a sharp knife, and the gag, which Devil Dick had put in his mouth, to prevent his giving any outcry, also was in the bottom of the wagon.

His belt of arms, rifle and roll of blankets were also gone.

"He has not freed himself!"

"Some one in this camp aided him!" sternly cried Devil Dick and his eyes flashed wickedly.

It was broad daylight now, and all beheld his angry face as he bent his look upon the faces before him.

"No one surely would have set this dangerous man free," Mr. Redmond said.

But then Will Harris stepped forward and responded:

"Friends, I've got to own up, for I did it."

"You?" his brother said angrily.

"Yes, Tom, I did it, for I could not bring

myself to believe that Lasso Luke was what this gentleman said.

"You remember he saved my life one day in one of the towns, when a drunken gang got hold of me, and I never forgot him for it."

"I knew this stranger had rescued us, and yet I couldn't believe that Lasso Luke could be the traitor he accused him of being."

"So I came here, after the first charge of the Indians, set him free and gave him his weapons."

"When did you do it?"

"Just after the Indians were first beaten back, sir."

"And you knew what your brother had seen on the prairies, to prove this man's guilt?"

"Not until afterwards, for I was over with the children yonder, when he came back."

"And how did he leave camp without being seen?"

"I went to light the fire, you know, and waited until he followed you down the trail."

"Well, you turned a very dangerous man loose, Mr. Harris, and I only hope that you will not have to bitterly regret from mistaken kindness," said Devil Dick.

"And I hold the same hope," was Tom Harris's rejoinder.

"I'm awful sorry, friends; but I did my duty as I then saw it, for I was sure that you, sir, would kill him to-day."

"It was an equal chance of his life against mine, man to man."

"True; but I had seen you in a fight back in the settlement, and then again when you came to our rescue, and I judged that he was as good as dead if he fought you."

"You are complimentary to me, Mr. Harris; but I only wish that your friend was dead."

"In fact, I shall have to kill him at sight now, if he does not get the drop on me from an ambush some day."

"It would be well, Mr. Redmond, to have breakfast and pull out of camp as soon as possible, for Lasso Luke may know where to find some other band of Comanches, though, fortunately, he is on foot."

"He will doubtless join those we drove off."

"No, indeed, for they regard him now as a traitor and would kill him before he could explain the mistake."

"I will mount my horse and scout around for half an hour," and five minutes after Devil Dick rode out of camp on his reconnaissance.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE MARCH.

DEVIL DICK made a wide circuit of the camp, and was gone for nearly an hour.

He discovered the way that the Comanches had retreated on foot, and their tracks in some soft bottom-land showed that they had been going at a run.

At the ford he found that they had removed the first Indian he had killed, and the wounded one also was gone.

If others had been hit, there was no sign of the fact.

In the timber there were found red stains, that showed some of the Indians had been suffering from wounds, and yet all the dead had been, beyond a doubt, dropped into the stream to sink from the sight of their white foes, for they certainly had not begun their retreat lumbered up with slain warriors.

Up the trail where they had made their desperate charge, the dead were being buried by Mr. Redmond and the others in a hastily-dug grave.

"They are human beings, sir, and we could not leave them to the wolves and vultures," explained Mr. Redmond.

"If you feel that way, sir, it is as well for you to take the time to bury them," was Devil Dick's answer; and he seemed more interested in counting the number of bodies than in the burial.

Riding on to the camp, he told the women folk not to be alarmed, as nothing but dead redskins were in sight, and all such could be relied upon as good Indians, in which there was no guile.

Then he led the cattle down, with the ponies captured, to get a little feed of grass and some water, while the people were eating breakfast and preparing for the march.

A substantial breakfast was prepared, and heartily enjoyed by all, after which, when the sun was just three hours high, the train pulled out upon its way.

Down the trail it went to the valley, across the ford, and thence on westward.

They urged their horses to a good pace, halted an hour at noon, and then once more pushed on toward a camp which Devil Dick had said was

almost as secure as the one of the night before, and which he hoped they would reach before sunset.

Mr. Redmond and Ruth rode ahead with Devil Dick, who was acting as guide, during the morning, and, ignoring their surroundings, the man began to talk of other scenes.

He proved himself a person of rare intelligence and superior education, and showed that he had traveled much.

A more entertaining companion, Mr. Redmond told his wife, when they halted at noon, he had never met.

He seemed to have lived in the largest cities, to have mingled in the best of society, and that he had wandered in foreign lands was known by what he said.

Why such a man of brilliant attainments should settle down to a wild life upon the Texas frontier, making a precarious existence by gambling, neither Mr. Redmond nor Ruth could understand.

At last Ruth felt that Richard Drummond had met with some deep grief in his past life, perhaps had lost his fortune, and unwilling to live as a poor man where once he had dwelt in luxury, had sought a home upon the border.

"I cannot believe that he has been guilty of any crime that has driven him here as a fugitive," she said to herself.

And yet she could not but admit that he must have been some time upon the frontier, to learn it as he knew it, to know its ways as he did.

He had won the name of Devil Dick, and it certainly had been from the desperate deeds he must have done.

Lasso Luke had not only spoken of him as a man to be dreaded, but his duel with the three men, when he first came before their notice, verified the guide's assertion of him.

In the afternoon Ruth again rode to the front and joined the volunteer guide.

She saw no harm in it, nor did her parents, and she wished to have him talk of her own father.

The next night they would reach their destination, and then, Devil Dick had already said, he must leave them, for though they would be upon the frontier, there were other ranches near, at least near for that land.

So Ruth again rode ahead with Devil Dick, until before sunset the camp was reached, a motte of timber upon a slight rise, and on the banks of a swiftly flowing stream.

With wood, water and grass in abundance, and an open prairie all around them, the train-people were delighted with their camp and felt that also as a point of defense Devil Dick had chosen well.

CHAPTER XII.

DENOUNCED.

WILLIAM HARRIS, whose mistaken kindness, had set Lasso Luke free, had been very much cast down after his act, and had kept aloof from others all the day.

He dreaded to meet the angry eyes of the volunteer guide, and his brother's remonstrance.

So when the train went into camp he gathered fire-wood and busied himself about his own camp-fire.

The horses and captured ponies were allowed to feed out upon the prairies until nightfall, when they were taken into the corral arranged for them, and William Harris offered to stand watch until midnight, and so he was posted where he could command a view of any one approaching the camps from the prairie, for the timber where they were encamped was in a bend of the stream that formed a horseshoe in shape, and comprised a couple of acres in size.

After supper as the others sat around the camp-fires, Mrs. Redmond asked Ruth to sing, and her father brought her guitar from the ambulance.

"Do you not sing, Mr. Drummond?" she asked as she ran her fingers over the strings.

"Would you suspect me of doing so, Miss Redmond?" he answered with a query.

"Yes."

"May I ask why?"

"Your voice is rich in tone, and somehow I believe you sing well."

"I do sing a little, and hence appreciate music, so please sing for us."

She obeyed and her voice was rich and full of melody.

Having sung several ballads she said:

"Now I believe you play also, so I will give you the guitar to accompany us with, for I intend to sing a duet with you."

"What shall it be?"

"What do you know?"

"Larboard Watch Ahoy!"

"Will that suit you?"

He ran his fingers over the strings with a master hand and without another word the duet was begun.

All enjoyed it, for the voices of the two blended well together and his accompaniment was a masterly one.

As the song ended William Harris called out from his post:

"Some horsemen are coming!"

Instantly all was excitement, and Devil Dick and Mr. Redmond moved, rifles in hand, toward the outpost, just as William Harris hailed:

"Halt! who are you?"

"An officer and men from Fort Bond."

"Ay ay, advance," was the answer and a party of five horsemen appeared.

They were met by Mr. Redmond, while Devil Dick returned to the camp-fire.

A moment after they advanced and in their midst was Lasso Luke, who had been mounted behind one of the soldiers.

The officer was a young lieutenant, for his shoulder-straps showed his rank, and he was walking by the side of Mr. Redmond, while behind came his four men and Lasso Luke.

"Mr. Drummond, I am sorry to say that there appears to be trouble ahead for you, for this is Lieutenant Herndon of Fort Bond, and he wishes to have a talk with you," said Mr. Redmond.

"I am wholly at Lieutenant Herndon's service, sir," was the haughty reply of the gambler, for he saw in the midst of the soldiers the face of his foe, Lasso Luke.

"I am glad to hear you say so, my man, as I feared you might compel me to use force."

"And why, sir?"

"Well, you are the man I am in search of."

"For what reason, sir?"

"You are Richard Drummond, I believe?"

"That is my name, sir."

"Otherwise known as Devil Dick."

"Yes, gambler and hunter at large, Lieutenant Herndon."

"You are the man I want, and are my prisoner."

The four soldiers dropped their carbines upon him at a signal from their officer, but Devil Dick did not wince, nor was there a quiver in his voice, as he asked:

"Why, sir, am I arrested?"

"Upon the charge of murder, and more, for having the intention of leading this train into a trap."

"My dear sir, you are on the wrong trail, for I never murdered a man in my life, though I have killed a number."

"I act only in self-defense and to save the life of others. But I understand from whence your information comes, as I see with you the man who was the treacherous guide of this train, and who did lead it into a trap, from which all present will say that I rescued them."

"This is the truth, Lieutenant Herndon, permit me to say," said Mr. Redmond.

"You doubtless so believe, sir, but you have been cleverly deceived by this man."

"Lasso Luke I know as a trusty scout and guide in the Government employ, and I found him afoot upon the prairies to-day and heard his story, that, while absent from your train he had been captured by a band of Comanches."

"These Comanches left him under guard while they went on to attack this train, and escaping from his captors he joined you, to be lassoed by this man, Devil Dick, gagged and bound."

"He then learned how Devil Dick had stampered the Indians, and more, how well he had served you afterwards he told me also; but he knew that the man was saving you for himself, as he is the secret leader of a band of outlaws, into whose clutches he was to lead you."

"I do not believe one word of this," hotly said Ruth Redmond, and she turned her flashing eyes upon the young officer who had denounced their defender and rescuer as an outlaw.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PRISONER.

THE sharp words of Ruth Redmond seemed to almost startle the officer.

He looked like one who had been struck a blow, when from her pretty lips came the disbelief of his words, and her beautiful eyes flashed upon him.

"I am sorry, Miss Redmond, to—"

"How do you know that I am Miss Redmond, may I ask, sir, for certainly I was not presented to you by name?"

He winced at this shot, but said:

"Lasso Luke told me that Mr. Redmond was

captain of the train, and that his wife and daughter were along, so I judged that you were Miss Redmond."

"I am, sir, and again I say that I do not believe the charge you make against the one man whose pluck saved us all from death."

"Still, Miss Redmond, I know my friend, Luke Harber, very well, and he is in Government employ and thoroughly to be trusted."

"He met me and told his story, and I was even then in search of Devil Dick for crimes he has been guilty of, and he is known to be the secret leader of a band of outlaws, whom you would have found merciless, indeed, had you fallen into their power to-morrow, for they are lying in wait for this very train."

The young officer spoke earnestly, and Ruth was silent.

All eyes turned upon Devil Dick.

He stood with folded arms, apparently indifferent, no signs visible upon his face of worry or anxiety.

Mr. Redmond and the others of the train were grouped near, and all seemed to feel the painful scene.

There stood Lasso Luke, the guide whom they had all liked, admired and trusted implicitly up to the day before, and whom the coming of the stranger, now accused of crime, had made guilty in their sight.

Lasso Luke had an anxious look upon his face, and also an expression of triumph, such as a man might feel who had vindicated himself of charges against him.

"May I ask, sir, how Lasso Luke explains away his intention of meeting the red-skins at night, and leading them to our camp?" asked Mr. Redmond.

"I met no red-skins, Pard Redmond," said the guide.

"No, but this man did, and playing your part, as he spoke their language, he planned with them to come upon the camp, and then plotted their destruction, while he also captured their ponies."

"Who saw him meet the Indians?"

"Mr. Harris, here."

"Will he swear that they were red-skins whom he met?" asked the officer.

"What can you say to this, Harris?" and Mr. Redmond turned toward the one who had been on watch with the stranger.

"Well, he met some one."

"Could you say that it was a red-skin?"

"No, sir, but I thought that it was."

"Well, it was one of his own men, and he then arranged the plot with him to corral your train to-morrow."

"That the Indians charged and were beaten back by him there is no doubt, for it was to his interest to save the train, while he felt very sure that they intended doing so."

"Now, Mr. Redmond, I am sorry to have to cause you trouble, but I must do my duty, and I arrest this man, Devil Dick, and I advise you to still keep your old guide, for whom I can, as an army officer, vouch most thoroughly, while I may say he is the only man who can guide you so as to avoid the outlaws now lying in wait for you, and whom my immediate recall to the fort will prevent from driving from your trail."

"As you are an army officer, sir, I am constrained to believe you, and to take your advice; but I can hardly realize that the man who has been our good friend can be all that you say he is."

"Well, sir, should you need proof, send a courier to Fort Bond, when you have reached your destination, and you shall learn from the commandant all particulars regarding this very remarkably clever scamp."

"Come, Drummond, up with your hands while I search you, and do not compel me to kill you in the presence of ladies!" and the young officer stepped toward the accused man.

Devil Dick simply raised his hands above his head with the remark:

"I have no intention of being shot down, so I surrender with discretion."

"But, let me say to you, Lasso Luke, and to your gang in uniform, that there will come a day of reckoning for this, mark my words."

"Silence, sir!" said the officer sternly.

"I will keep silent when I have told Miss Redmond, for I believe that she doubts your charges against me, to keep her eye upon Lasso Luke, and kill him as she would a snake if he attempts treachery toward the people of this train."

"I am at your service, lieutenant."

"You have a horse?"

"Oh, yes, and a good one."

"Saddle and bridle him, men, for we must be on our way," and declining to have some sup-

per cooked for himself and men, the officer again asked Mr. Redmond:

"Do you wish to keep Harber as your guide, sir, or shall I take him with me?"

"Under the circumstances, sir, we will retain Lasso Luke, who I hope does not feel hard toward us for doubting him."

"No indeed, friends, for I saw how cleverly you were taken in and could not blame you," was Lasso Luke's response.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN INSULT RESENTED.

DEVIL DICK made no resistance to the binding of his hands behind his back with a lariat, and his horse being then led up, he was aided to mount, when his feet were strapped together also.

"Good-by, Mr. Drummond, and if it is any consolation for you to know it, let me say that I believe you to be innocent of the charges made against you by this officer," and with the words Ruth Redmond stepped forward with hand extended.

"I am bound, Miss Redmond, so pardon my seeming discourtesy," returned the prisoner with a smile.

"Ah, I had forgotten; but I can yet grasp a hand in bondage," and with the remark Ruth put up her hand and grasped that of the man in whom she alone held trust.

Then she turned and walked slowly away without noticing the young officer's low bow, as he mounted and rode off with his men and prisoner.

"Ruth, my dear, you were rude to the lieutenant," remarked Mrs. Redmond.

"I cannot help it, mother, for I will not believe that Mr. Drummond is the man he is accused of being," was the response.

"But, do you believe me to be all that he accused me of being, Miss Ruth?" asked Lasso Luke, who stood by the fire with the others.

She turned squarely upon him and her eyes burned with anger, while she said almost fiercely:

"Yes, I do believe all that Drummond says you are."

The guide laughed, though his face darkened, and he said sarcastically:

"Well your case is a bad one for love at first sight for an outlaw."

Mr. Redmond would have resented the words, but he had not time, for, quick as a flash Ruth had drawn her revolver, one she always wore in her belt, and the muzzle looked straight into the eyes of the guide, while her voice quivered with rage as she cried:

"Down on your knees, Lasso Luke, and beg my pardon for your insulting words. Quick, obey, or you have not a second to live!"

No one realized more than did Lasso Luke that Ruth meant what she said; but he had the presence of mind to pass off his back-down in a clever way, so said:

"Of course I beg pardon, Miss Ruth, if my words uttered in joke gave offense."

"Down on your knees, sir, quick!"

He obeyed with remarkable quickness, for he saw the danger signal in her eyes.

"Now, sir, ask my pardon!" cried the dauntless Ruth.

"I humbly crave your pardon, Miss Ruth—"

"Miss Redmond, sir."

"Miss Redmond—for my words."

"Now, begone, and remember that from this moment we are foes, Lasso Luke, so never dare address word to me again," and the angry girl wheeled suddenly and strode toward the little "A" tent which had been her quarters since starting upon their long journey.

Mr. Redmond rather enjoyed the discomfiture of the guide, though he did not show his feelings in this respect openly, and said:

"My daughter took your words to heart, Harber, and you should never have uttered them. Be careful not to offend her more, for I pledge you my word she is not one to be trifled with."

"I had no intention of offending her, Captain Redmond, and am most sorry for what I said."

"She took words before, never meant except in joke, in deadly earnest, and I have won her hatred, it seems; but I will be most careful in future, sir, rest assured."

"Now I desire to thank Mr. Harris for saving my life, as he did in setting me free last night, for that man intended to kill me."

"Do you really think so?"

"Well, sir, you heard him say I should fight a duel with him, and when I looked at my weapons this morning, I found the bullets in my revolvers had been removed, and replaced with clay wrapped around with tin foil."

"He would have killed me, sir, and so I owe to Mr. Harris my life."

"As I am sure he has some of his outlaw band lying in wait, I will guide the train around their ranging-ground, sir, and so it will take two days to reach your destination."

"Then I will bid you all farewell, and I am sure you will some day feel that I was indeed the one who was wronged."

"We feel so now, Harber, for the word of the lieutenant was convincing, though it was hard to believe that we had been twice so cleverly deceived, first in you, then in the man who denounced you."

"Pray take full charge of the train again as before, and you know best whether to set a double guard to-night, or not?"

"I will watch the camp, sir, while the rest of you sleep, for you need rest all of you, after your hardships of the past thirty-six hours."

"And you also will rest."

"Not I, sir, for I am hardened against loss of sleep and fatigue, so all will rest."

Several others urged that they too should be allowed to stand on watch, or at least relieve the guide at midnight, but he refused all aid, and added:

"If I find my eyes getting too heavy, I will come and call you, Mr. Redmond; but I hardly think I shall have to do so, for I shall go on post mounted and that will keep me awake and also give me a better view over the prairie."

"Well, Lasso Luke, as you will allow no one else to stand guard with you, and shall be mounted, permit me to say that my interest in this train will keep me awake, and I shall saddle my horse and keep watch on you," and Ruth Redmond came from her little tent ready for the self-imposed duty of standing guard.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FAIR SENTINEL.

WHATEVER the feelings of Lasso Luke, at this direct charge of Ruth Redmond that he would bear watching, he did not show any feeling in the matter, but quickly responded:

"I had not hoped for such pleasant company, on my lonely duty to-night."

"I shall be most happy of your society, Miss Redmond."

Ruth bit her lips, but made no response to his words, while she called the negro man, Primus, to saddle and bridle her horse for her.

The animal was led up to the fire near where she stood, while Lasso Luke had gone to get his own horse.

"My child, do you not think you are carrying this too far against Lasso Luke?" asked Mr. Redmond reproachfully.

"No, father, for I suspect the man of treachery and I am determined that he shall not betray us again."

"But you remember what Lieutenant Herndon said?"

"Oh yes, and he may be honest in his belief that the guide is an angel and Drummond a devil."

"But actions of the two men concerned speak louder than words, for there is the guide who did prove traitor—"

"According to what Devil Dick said."

"Yes, and according to my own views, father, and Drummond certainly proved himself a very brave man, risking his life to save us from death."

"That is true, but for a purpose of his own, the lieutenant said."

"Yes, one man's opinion for and against, and now it is a girl's opinion for Devil Dick and against Lasso Luke."

"If I am wrong I shall feel sorry; but if I am right, then I shall hamper that man this night from any devilry he may contemplate, for while he watches the camp I'll watch him."

"I am sorry to have you do this, my child, and wish you would reconsider your determination at my request, and—"

"And what, father?"

"And not force me to command obedience."

"See here, father, when I am following the dictates of my heart and conscience, as to what is right or wrong, and believe there is much at stake, I shall not obey a command of yours, so spare yourself the pain of seeing me refuse by not issuing any orders to me."

"I shall do sentinel duty this night, sir, for I am determined, and if Lasso Luke contemplates any treachery he will have to answer to me."

Mr. Redmond sighed, for he knew the adamant will of his adopted daughter, before which his own was forced to yield.

"I will send your mother to talk with you, my child," he said as he retreated.

"She will have to hunt for me out on the

prairie then, father, for I see Lasso Luke going that way, and it is his trail that I am on this night."

As Ruth spoke she leaped lightly into her saddle, brought her rifle around and placed it across her lap and started out after the guide, whom the firelight had revealed to her riding toward the prairie.

She soon came up behind him and turning in his saddle he asked:

"Do you mean what you said, that you intend watching me?"

"I do intend to."

"You doubt me?"

"I believe you to be a traitor."

"How could I betray you to-night, for there are no Indians around?"

"That I am not so sure of."

"But I am."

"I do not take your word for it."

"Well, I am going to scout around and find out."

"I shall follow you."

"I shall go some distance."

"Then you are unfit for a guard, to leave your camp unprotected."

"The camp will be all right."

"Yes, I will see that it is."

"You?"

"Yes."

"How can you protect it?"

"Well, I am on duty to-night as sentinel, and if you go out of sight of the camp, I shall shoot you as a foe on your return without a challenge."

"You would not dare do so."

"Try me."

"But for what?"

"Well, you are supposed to guard the camp, not prowl the prairies in search of your Indian allies, and if you dare to desert your post then I shall treat you as a deserter."

"You are warned, Lasso Luke, so do to suit your own humor."

It was evident that the man fretted under the conduct of the girl and her bold words.

He hesitated like one who knew not what to do.

She calmly rode nearer, her rifle pointing in his direction as it lay upon her lap, and her hands grasping it.

She seemed wholly unmoved, and patiently awaited for him to speak.

At last he did so.

"Miss Redmond, none of us are masters of our affections, and because I felt love in my heart for you I seemed to have aroused all the venom in your nature, and which I did not believe you to possess."

"Now I offered you a man's love and you rejected it, and now you accuse me of treachery, and threaten me with death if I act contrary to your wishes."

"Have you said all that you wish?"

"Yes, excepting that I will not be browbeaten into going against my ideas of my duty by man or woman."

"Well, let me answer you that had I believed your love honest I would have respected you for it and given you my friendship, as I could not return your affection; but, you threatened me, and that raised the devil in my nature, and I resented it."

"Now I believe you to be a traitor to us all, and if you leave the post of duty where you now stand, I shall follow you to the bitter end."

"Now, Lasso Luke, it is war between us," and Ruth patted her rifle as it lay across her lap and urged her horse close to the animal ridden by the guide.

CHAPTER XVI.

LASSO LUKE'S GUARDIAN.

THE guide saw that he had aroused in Ruth Redmond a spirit of resentment that would not down.

When she had refused his love, unfortunately for himself he had made threats.

That is always the way to turn a woman's regard into hatred, and Ruth was a girl of inherent pluck, had a will of iron, and would face any danger, while she was quick to resent a wrong.

The others of the train might think what they wished about the guide, and be satisfied with Lieutenant Herndon's statement that he knew the man well, that he was in Government employ and was to be trusted.

"I know him, too," she muttered to herself.

"And I shall watch him."

"I am acquainted with the wild life on this frontier, though I was only in my fifteenth year

when I left, and as our volunteer guide was taken from us, after proving, to me at least, that Lasso Luke was a traitor, I shall do all in my power to protect the train."

Such was her reasoning, and she was determined that Lasso Luke should not have another chance to slip away and bring a band of redskins down upon them.

In the same ratio that she doubted the guide, she now trusted Richard Drummond.

The charges against him by Lieutenant Herndon had not the slightest weight with her.

"That man acted to save us, and was sincere, desperate a life as he may lead, and I only hope he will be able to make his escape by the little aid it was possible for me to give him."

Such were her thoughts as she sat there upon her horse, with Lasso Luke but a few paces distant.

The guide had lighted his pipe, turned his eyes out upon the prairie and seemed to settle down to sentinel duty without further parley.

Just behind him was the fair sentinel, and she sat as serenely in her saddle watching him, and also trying to penetrate the darkness of the prairie for any threatened danger.

An hour passed, and then another, but their positions had not changed.

Having refilled his pipe several times the guide placed it in his pocket, when Ruth remarked:

"I never knew a good sentinel smoke on his post."

"The scent of that tobacco could be carried a long way off."

"Well, there is no danger here, Miss Redmond," was the reply.

"I am not so sure of that."

"Come, now, ain't you tired, and willing to leave standing guard to me?"

"I am not."

"Well, I must make a circuit in the rear of the camp, crossing the ford and having a look at the other side of the river, for if danger threatens it is in that direction."

"Will you guard this side until my return?"

"I will not."

"Why?"

"If you go, I follow close behind you."

"See here, Miss Redmond, I am a man to put up with a great deal, for I have been schooled to it, especially from one of your sex, but I must say you are going too far."

"I am doing what I deem my duty, and I shall so continue."

"Well, I am going to ride across the stream in the rear, and if you follow me you will have to swim your horse, and it is dangerous work among the rocks."

"I do not fear to follow, sir, where you dare to lead; but the very danger of crossing the stream except at the ford, protects the camp from a foe in that direction, as you know, and as this timber is surrounded, except at this point—this is the position, and the only one, for a man to stand on guard."

"Well, I am going to reconnoiter, and if you follow you do so at your own peril remember."

"Hold on!"

She dropped the muzzle of her rifle upon him as she spoke, and he checked his horse instantly.

"See here, Lasso Luke, we may as well understand each other."

"Well?"

"I believe you to be a traitor, and hence I watch you, and you need not believe that I am the only one doing so."

The man glanced quickly toward the timber, but Ruth continued:

"Now I am not going to follow you across the river, or into any danger, for this is the sentinel's post, and here you stay."

"Yes."

"If you attempt to ride away from this place, I will shoot you as a soldier is shot who deserts his post of duty in the face of an enemy."

"I do not care for your threats, Miss Redmond."

"Prove your words by making an attempt to leave this post."

There was something so quiet in the challenge, and yet so determined, that the guide dared not put her to the test.

He was a man and a suspected one, she was a woman to do what she deemed her duty against all odds.

So he backed down gracefully with the remark:

"Well, Miss Redmond, I am very tired, and as you seem determined to stand guard duty I will go and turn in."

"You will not leave this post, sir."

"Ah! it would not be a gallant act, would it?"

"Well, I'll spread my blanket on the prairie here, and rest," and with this the guide dis-

mounted, spread his blanket, staked out his horse and lay down to rest, Ruth standing guard silently over him and over the camp.

CHAPTER XVII.

RUTH'S STRATEGY.

IT was a very evident fact, that disguise it as he might, Lasso Luke was worried at the conduct of the beautiful frontier girl.

He did not drop to sleep as he pretended doing.

Making himself comfortable, he laid down with his eyes wide open.

They were fixed on the motionless form of the girl.

She remained like a statue upon her horse, her rifle ready and the rein taut so that the animal could not get his head down to feed and stray away.

Saddled and bridled still, but staked out at short lariat was the horse of the guide, and he cropped grass close about where his master lay pretending to sleep, for he had begun to breathe hard and try to give the semblance of sleep.

As a soldier sentinel on duty in a dangerous position the girl sat, her eyes roving over the prairie horizon, and searching it as well as she could in the light of the stars.

Now and then the sharp howl of a wolf was heard, and then the night-bird's screech in the timber, aroused by the chirp of an insect in the prairie grass.

But nothing disturbed Ruth Redmond, and the guide appeared to sleep serenely on.

At last the man moved, and at once the muzzle of the rifle was lowered to cover him.

He was no more nor less than the girl's prisoner.

"Will she never go to sleep?" he muttered.

Then he sat up at last, as he seemed to feel it was useless for him to expect Ruth to lose herself in slumber.

From a sitting posture he arose and asked:

"Well, have you seen any enemy?"

"Only one, guide."

"You will believe me your foe?"

"Yes."

"And yet I laid down and had a good nap?"

"No, you were not asleep."

"What?"

"You did not close your eyes, Lasso Luke, for I was watching you."

"Well, I'll go to sleep if I do not move about a little."

"What time is it?"

"I should think about one o'clock."

"So late?" he quickly asked.

"Yes; perhaps later than that."

"Well, I'll hoof it out on the prairie and back, for a short distance, to wake up."

"You will do nothing of the kind."

"Is not my horse left here enough to show you that I am not going far?"

"No; for you left the camp last night afoot, when Mr. Harris politely set you free, and to-night you returned with soldiers."

"You might go on foot now and come back in an hour with Comanches."

The man muttered an oath, and said, angrily:

"I see that you do not trust me."

"Not in the slightest degree."

"Well, what is to be done?"

"Go to sleep in earnest, for I shall stand guard."

"It's a bargain," and he again threw himself down upon his blanket, just as Mr. Redmond came out from the camp toward them.

"My child, I fear you are making yourself ill by your conduct to-night," he said, reproachfully.

"No, father, I am saving my life and the life of others in the train."

"She will persist, Mr. Redmond, that I am a traitor, and will not let me move from here."

"This is foolish, Ruth."

"As you see it, yes, father, but not from my standpoint."

"I laid down to rest, captain, as she insisted upon standing guard."

"You were wise, guide."

"He did not sleep, for he was watching me, hoping I would drop off into slumber and he could slip away."

"But why should he wish to do so?"

"To warn his red allies to be on the watch for us to-morrow."

"Nonsense! Come, Ruth, come to the camp and retire."

"I will not move from here, sir, so do not urge it."

"That man is foiled, so he can go to sleep, for I shall watch the camp, and the guide."

Mr. Redmond turned away and retraced his steps to the camp, and Lasso Luke threw himself down upon his blanket and again pretended to sleep.

Thus an hour passed, and then the head of the girl sentinel grew heavy.

It swayed from side to side, then drooped lower and lower until the watching guide said:

"She is asleep. Now to give her the slip!"

He started to creep away from his blanket, and had reached his stake-pin, when a mocking laugh broke the stillness of the night, followed by the words:

"Drop that, or die!" and Ruth Redmond had the guide covered with her rifle.

He did drop it, and a bitter execration also, but he came back to his blanket and threw himself down once more, as the young girl said:

"I played possum on you, Lasso Luke, just to catch you, and I did, for you tried to sneak away."

"It is nearly dawn now, and I have thwarted your little game."

"When day dawns I will seek an hour's rest while the horses are getting a feed and breakfast is cooking; but until it is light I shall still keep you covered by my rifle."

"Now, go to sleep, or lie awake, as you please, for I am not a sentinel to slumber on my post," and she again laughed at the discomfiture of the guide she had so effectively outwitted.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LASSO LUKE'S SHADOW.

JUST as day began to dawn, Mr. Redmond and Thomas Harris came out of the camp.

The guide was asleep now in earnest upon his blanket, but Ruth was wide awake and watchful.

"Well, my child, I hope you are satisfied with your night's work?"

"I am, father, for I feel that I have saved this train, for that man tried to slip away when he thought I was asleep, and that he is a traitor I will yet prove."

"It is but a whim of yours, Ruth, to believe so."

"No, Captain Redmond, for I am with Miss Ruth in her belief, that of the two men, Devil Dick was the one to trust," Thomas Harris said in a low tone.

"Well, I'll stand guard now, and you seek rest."

"I will, but drive the cattle out for a feed and water, and do not let them stray; and more, father, do not let that man leave camp," and she pointed to the sleeping guide.

"I will feel all right if I get a couple of hours' sleep, but keep your eyes on Lasso Luke, Mr. Harris."

"I will, Miss Ruth."

She dismounted now, and left her horse to be unsaddled and staked out by her father, while she aroused the camp to get out the other cattle.

Then she sought her little tent, and was asleep in an instant.

The camp was astir, the Harris boys got out the cattle to water and grass, Primus built fires, and his wife Nannie got breakfast.

All this took time, for there was no hurry in the start, and when at last Ruth was called, she had gotten a couple of hours of undisturbed slumber.

She awoke refreshed, made her toilet and ate a good breakfast; but she could see that her mother and the others were provoked with her for what they called her stubbornness.

As for the Harris children they regarded her as a heroine, to have stood guard all night out on the prairie.

The guide was quiet, yet pleasant, and merely laughed at what he called "Miss Ruth's freak."

He did not appear to be angry about it, and called the camp to pull out in his usual cheery tones.

As he rode to the front, as was his wont, Ruth mounted and followed him.

She had her haversack hung at her saddlehorn, and had put in it a very substantial lunch, while she had filled her canteen with cool water from the spring in the timber.

"You certainly do not intend to watch the guide to-day, Ruth?" angrily said Mr. Redmond, as she rode to the front.

"I certainly do, for I do not intend this train shall be led into any trap."

"As you appear to share my suspicions, Mr. Harris, may I ask, if the guide goes very far ahead, you will follow us, for I shall stick to his trail like a wolf?"

"I foiled him last night, and to-day he will lead us into a trap if he can."

"I am really angry with you, Ruth," said Mr. Redmond, sternly, and he turned away, while Thomas Harris rejoined:

"You can count on me, Miss Ruth, for I admire your pluck, and you may be right, after all, so it is best to take no chances."

The guide was by this time some three hundred yards ahead, but urging her horse, Ruth soon came up with him.

"Is it to be the same thing as last night, Miss Redmond?" he asked.

"Yes, if you mean am I to watch you."

"Well, let me tell you that you will have to do some rough and hard riding."

"I am willing."

"As you seem determined to follow me, I will return to the camp and explain to your father that I may be absent all day."

"Do so."

"You intend to be my companion, then?"

"No, your guard."

"Ah!" and the man bit his lips, and said no more until the train came up.

Then he said:

"There are three fords to the stream ahead of us, Captain Redmond, and I wish to visit them and decide upon the safest crossing."

"I can get back to the point where you camp at noon, in time to say which one you are to take."

"Miss Redmond insists upon going with me, however."

"This she shall not do."

"And I say I shall, and it is useless, father, for you to attempt to check me."

"This man means mischief, and if you will not watch him I shall."

"Permit me to go with him in your stead, Miss Ruth," said Thomas Harris.

"I am willing, sir," was Ruth's prompt rejoinder.

"I am not to be watched by any man, Mr. Harris, so I shall not allow you to go for that purpose," hotly said the guide, now showing anger.

"Then a woman shall watch you, and I go," was Ruth's reply.

"So be it, if you care to risk what is before you."

"I am not to be frightened by threats, Mr. Lasso Luke."

The guide said no more, but rode away at a canter, and in spite of her father's command to return, Ruth followed him.

"The girl is incorrigible," angrily said Mr. Redmond.

"I will follow after awhile, for Miss Ruth has some motive for her conduct," Thomas Harris said, and half an hour after he rode on along the trail left by the guide and his indefatigable girl trailer.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GIRL SHADOWER.

FOR a couple of miles did Lasso Luke keep up his canter, without once glancing behind him.

But he knew that so surely as did his shadow follow him with the sunlight, so sure was Ruth Redmond coming on behind him.

It was enough to make the bravest man nervous, to be thus dogged.

If innocent at heart, then he must suffer keenly to be doubted, and by one whose love he had sought to gain.

If guilty, then he must have fretted at the thought that she was foiling him in his plans.

The stream which they were to cross toward nightfall had three fords within twenty miles of each other.

One of these had a prairie approach on either side, with a few scattering trees upon the banks.

The second was in a rolling country sparsely timbered, and the third was where the stream ran through hill-lands and with a rugged country about its banks, which were thick with timber.

The latter crossing was the wildest, and most dangerous, the one to be avoided by a safe guide, for if foes lurked upon the trail that part of the country would be naturally their hiding-place.

At a point where the train would halt for noonday rest, the trails branched off to their respective crossings.

Once across the river and the emigrants would have reached their Eldorado, the land of rich pastures and ranches, and where were to be found neighbors, though far apart.

There too was the Sunset Ranch, the home of the dead Captain Redmond, and left in the care of a competent overseer.

To reach it, and the places where the Harris Brothers were to settle, the lower ford, with

prairie land upon either side, would have been the direct and easy way.

But Lasso Luke, as well as Lieutenant Haddon had urged against it, as it would be on this trail that Devil Dick's outlaws would lie in wait for the train.

So it was that Lasso Luke was to ride ahead, strike the prairie crossing first, then follow up the stream to the other two and riding back lead the train by the ford he deemed best.

It would give him a ride of some fifty miles, while the train was making twenty; but from this long distance he could not scare Ruth Redmond off.

An hour's rapid ride brought them to the spot where the train would go into camp at noon, and there the guide halted.

"I go to the left here to the Prairie Crossing," he said.

"I go with you."

"It is just ten miles."

"That is not far."

"Then to the next crossing is ten more."

"Well?"

"And ten to the Hill Crossing."

"Yes."

"And ten back here."

"Making forty miles; but I don't mind that in the least, and my horse will stand all yours will."

"It is now eight o'clock."

"Yes, so my watch tells me."

"We will not get back here, where the train will halt at noon and await my return, until two o'clock."

"I don't care for that."

"You will go?"

"Don't ask silly questions, sir, but lead on."

Lasso Luke gave utterance to a very decided oath, and said almost savagely:

"Girl, what are you?"

"Your shadower," was the cool response, as she gazed squarely into the face of Lasso Luke.

He made no reply, but rode on once more at a canter, going straight on the trail to the Prairie Crossing of the river.

Right behind him came his Girl Shadower, as determined as ever not to let the guide get away from her sight.

"I was a fool not to leave the camp when she was asleep this morning; but I certainly did not expect the girl to dog me to death all day," muttered the guide, and he viciously spurred his horse, to the surprise of the animal, which at once sprung forward at a run.

But close upon his heels came the fleet mare of Ruth Redmond, and the guide realized that he could not run away from his shadower.

At last the ford was reached, the horses were watered, and a short rest was made.

Then the guide took the trail up to the next crossing, and he rode slowly along, as though dreading an ambush, when he came toward the hills.

At the second ford they halted, and Ruth ate her lunch quietly, for it was near noon, and yet she kept her eye upon the guide the while.

He also took a bite, and, mounting once more, pushed on for the Hills Crossing of the river.

This was reached without seeing a soul, or any indication of danger.

As the horses entered the stream to drink, the guide suddenly whirled his lasso over his head and the noose settled down about the arms of the young girl, pinioning them close to her side, and springing up to her he cried:

"Now I am master, Ruth Redmond, and shall stop your shadowing me!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE SOLDIER GUARD.

WHEN the soldiers rode away from the camp, with Devil Dick their prisoner, the latter was bound hands and feet, as has been recorded.

His hands were secured behind him, and his feet beneath his horse, so that escape seemed impossible.

The lieutenant rode first, then two of the soldiers, next came Devil Dick, and bringing up the rear were the other two cavalrymen.

The officer led at a lope across the prairies, and seemed to know the country well, for he did not hesitate on the way.

He had gone for a number of miles before a halt was made for rest, and then but half an hour was allowed.

Resuming their way they held over toward the hill country, instead of to the southward, and then Devil Dick spoke for the first time.

"Lieutenant?"

"Yes."

"You said you were going to Fort Bond?"

"Well?"

"Are you lost?"

"Why?"
 "You are not on the right trail."
 "Are you sure?"
 "I am."
 "Well, I am on a trail I intend to follow."
 "That was my idea."
 "You had best to keep your ideas to yourself."

"Why so?"
 "It may not be healthy to air them here."
 "So I thought; but you can do no more than hang me, so I am going to tell you what I think?"

"Well, sir?"
 "I do not believe you have any authority to arrest me?"

"Why not?"
 "Well, you were just scouting around the prairie, and met Lasso Luke, whom you once knew as a Government scout, and believed his story, so went with him after my scalp."

"And got it."
 "Apparently, yes; but you will have to prove to your commandant that I am guilty of crime, or he will let me go."

"You think so?"
 "I know so, for I am not unknown to the officers of Fort Bond, and you must be a new man there not to know me."

"Oh, I have heard of you, and never any good."

"That may be; but it's proving a crime before being sentenced."

"But may I ask where you are going?"

"I wish to find some of your outlaw band."

"Ah! you expect to?"

"Yes."
 "Well, go ahead; but it will be a long ride before you do, for in all the deviltry I am guilty of I go it alone."

"You do?"

"Yes, I play a lone hand, and I frequently hold trumps."

"So I have heard, no matter how you get them."

"Well, I am a gambler, born and bred, I may say, for my father and grandfather gambled away fortunes before me, or I would have inherited vast wealth; but I love chance, and I am willing to bet you now that you never get me safely to Fort Bond."

"What will you bet?"

"Oh, I am not particular, so suit your own pocketbook."

"I'll make it a hundred and let the sergeant hold the stakes."

"No, though I am obliged to the sergeant, I do not exactly go into ecstasies over his looks. He may be honest, but if so his face belies him, and a couple of hundred dollars might tempt him to turn cowboy instead of soldier."

"If I lose, I'll send you the money, and if you lose, I shall get it from you, some day."

"You are a strange one."

"I was born a strange one; but is it a bet?"

"It is."

"Good! then now look out that you win."

"You appear to have doubts about my doing so."

"Enough doubt to wager you a hundred dollars that you do not get me to Fort Bond alive and well."

"The bet is made."

"I will double the sum if you say so."

"Good!"

"Then it stands at two hundred even?"

"Yes; but why do you suppose I will not get you there?"

"In the first place you are going in the wrong direction."

"Well?"

"In the country you are heading for is the rendezvous of a band of outlaws."

"Your men?"

"They are known as the Invisibles, for though they are known to have their haunts in the hills, the Texas Rangers have even given up trying to find them, and when they give up a game, then you may consider it is not to be won."

"And you are chief of the Invisibles?"

"No; but I wish I was for the time being."

"Why?"

"I'd soon get out of your tender clutches, lieutenant, and give you and your men a scare that would send you flying for your fort."

"I do not fear meeting the Invisibles in the slightest, though I have their chief a prisoner."

"Well, if they don't make themselves visible on the trail you are now on, then I am greatly mistaken."

"If they do then you will have company, for I shall capture them."

"You sing loud, young man; but then that is the way with you youngsters fresh from West

Point; you think you can do anything. But, just wait and see how you will change your mind when you meet your match."

No more was said by the officer, and reaching a good camping-place for the balance of the night, the party halted, and the prisoner, not unkindly cared for, was soon sleeping soundly upon his blanket, though still securely bound.

CHAPTER XXI.

DEVIL DICK SURPRISED.

THE camp to which the lieutenant led the way seemed to be well known to him, Devil Dick noticed.

He might be a new officer at the fort, but he had certainly learned the country well.

The camp was in a canyon that widened into a basin-like valley.

There was a swiftly flowing stream, plenty of timber, and a meadow land for the horses to graze upon.

The soldiers made the prisoner as comfortable as circumstances would permit, but to guard against any escape, impossible though it seemed, stretched themselves upon either side of him, forming in part a human square about him.

The officer lay a short distance apart and no watch was kept.

In the morning when Devil Dick awoke, he found the soldiers still sleeping, so he lay quiet watching them; for the sun was rising and casting its rays into the little valley.

He made a movement to sit up, and instantly the soldiers awoke.

"You sleep lightly, gentlemen," he said.

"We have to," the sergeant responded.

The voices aroused the officer. He ordered breakfast cooked at once, and freed the prisoner's hands for him to make his toilet and freshen up, though he stood over him with his revolver the while.

Devil Dick's captivity did not appear to affect his appetite, for he ate with a relish, then held his hands out once more for the bonds, and was ready to mount with the others.

As they rode along once more the officer had the prisoner ride by his side, and after awhile asked:

"How was it, Devil Dick, that you suspected Lasso Luke of being an outlaw?"

"I did not suspect him."

"Eh?"

"I knew him to be an outlaw, and in fact am pretty sure that he is a member of the Invisibles, a spy and a runner for them."

"You think so, eh?"

"Well, I wager high on it, and that he is the ally of red-skins, too."

"Do you believe it?"

"I saw enough to convince me that it was so."

"What did you see?"

"I have heard hard stories of him and he knows that people distrust him, for he kept out of sight as the guide of the train, when he passed settlements where he might meet some one who knew him."

"He did?"

"Yes, and at one place where I had a duel with three men who were hunting me down, because I killed their pard, who attempted to rob me one night, Lasso Luke gave the people of the train a ghost story about my deeds, that horrified them."

"I have heard of your deeds myself."

"You have never heard that I was other than a square foe?"

"No, I have heard so much of you that I am glad to meet you; but tell me why you thought Lasso Luke was the ally of Comanches?"

Devil Dick stated how he had come to follow the train, when he heard that Comanches were abroad in its way, and knew that Lasso Luke was the guide.

He told of his disappearance, return, and the story the guide told, and how he had made him a prisoner, and Thomas Harris had set him free.

"Now I went out on the prairie and played Lasso Luke and the result was I found the red-skins were his allies."

"The truth was, if he is a member of the Invisibles, then he concluded he could make more by going back on them and getting the red-skins to wipe out the train, for he is determined to get possession of the beautiful daughter of Mr. Redmond."

"You think he loves her?"

"Well, I would not blame him if he did; but he knows a secret about her that very few are aware of."

"A secret?"

"Yes; the girl will be very rich."

"Ah! and he hoped to get money from her?"

"No, he hoped to force her to marry him and get it all."

"I see; but the girl?"

"Despised him, and refused his love."

"Does she know about this fortune?"

"She does not, that I am aware of."

"And you think it was Lasso Luke's intention to get possession of the girl and force her to marry him?"

"As I got the idea from the Indian who met me on the prairie, he gave me to understand, believing me to be Lasso Luke, that he and his warriors were to have the outfit, plunder, scalps and all, in return for allowing him to get full possession of the girl."

"That was it?"

"Yes, sir, and for fear we may be shot down by the Invisibles, I tell you, as an army officer, what I know, so you can protect that young lady from Lasso Luke, the man whom you trust."

"If I am knocked over, just tell her to find Marks the Miner, of the Soldier's Mine, in Hard Times City, New Mexico, and demand of him her rights, and she will get them."

"I'll make a note of it, Devil Dick," and the officer did so.

"Now, Devil Dick, I am going to tell you something that will surprise you."

"Yes, lieutenant?"

"I happen to know that Lasso Luke is a secret member of the band of Invisible outlaws."

"You know this?"

"Yes."

"And yet you, an officer of the army, took sides with a known outlaw against me, whom you suspect only, having no proof?"

"Yes, I sided with Lasso Luke, but not as an army officer."

"How do you mean?"

"I am an Invisible myself," was the reply, and it brought a look of utmost surprise to the face of Devil Dick.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE OUTLAW INVISIBLES.

THE words of Lieutenant Herndon brought a look of almost consternation into the face of the prisoner, Devil Dick.

He could not speak in his amazement, but only looked at the officer in silence.

At last, with a laugh, the officer said:

"You are surprised!"

"Don't I look it?"

"It is true."

"I can hardly believe it."

"We played our part well, did we not?"

"To perfection; but your men also belong to the band?"

"Yes."

"And you are not soldiers?"

"Oh, yes, to-day, and to-morrow cowboys."

"I see."

"We are whatever our clothes and circumstances make us."

"I understand."

"We carry along with us several disguises, and can make lightning changes if need be."

"You are generous to tell it all to me."

"Oh, I regard you as a dead man."

"You do?"

"Yes; for you are to be put to death to-night."

"No!"

"Yes."

"Is that a fact?" and Devil Dick was once more himself.

"Yes; I'll tell you more about our band, knowing that your hours are numbered."

"It will be most entertaining to know."

"You see I got your ideas about Lasso Luke, whom I have suspected of treachery toward us, as several times his information has gone wrong about trains, but the trains were met by red-skins all the same."

"I see."

"Well, when he escaped from you he dared not show up among the Comanches, knowing that you had impersonated him, and then led the red-skins into a trap where they were wiped out."

"Yes."

"So he got away from a locality doubly dangerous to him, and he went on foot, too, for his rescuer did not provide him with a horse."

"He couldn't, or he would have given him a wagon and all, I guess."

"Well, I was scouting along with my men, for I am lieutenant of the band, and, hearing a shot, rode over a ridge to see who had done the shooting."

"It was Lasso Luke, and he had shot a deer."

"He was apparently delighted to see us, and gave us the story that you know."

"As he is captain, I obeyed orders."

"Captain?"
 "Yes."
 "Is he chief?"
 "He is, though I remain in command of the band, you see."
 "You do the red work, take the licks, and he gets the plunder."
 "It has been about that."
 "Well?"
 "He told me that he wished us to change our buckskin rig for the uniforms we now have on, for we go prepared, as I said."
 "We showed up, rigged ourselves in our uniform, and with the captain riding on the horse of our lightest man, who rode behind him, we set out to head off the train."
 "He was to be backed up by me, and to go on with the train, leading it into a trap over at the Hills Crossing to-day."
 "See?"
 "Oh, yes, it is perfectly clear."
 "I was to keep you a prisoner for him, and to-night he is to be avenged upon you, putting you to death by torture."
 "How kindly is his feeling for me!"
 "Yes; but I have an idea that he intends to give us the slip?"
 "No!"
 "Yes, for I believe he wishes to get away with Miss Redmond, and so will guide the train clear of us, and then run away with her."
 "Or he may let the train fall into our hands, and thus let it be thought that Miss Redmond was also among the killed, as well as himself as guide, while he escapes with her to New Mexico, to get possession of her mine."
 "It would be just like him."
 "Now I am not one to kill women and children."
 "Plunder them, oh, yes?"
 "But as for killing them I won't do it."
 "You are better than I gave you credit for, as the Invisibles seldom spare any one it is said."
 "They are slandered, and Indians frequently massacre and we get the name of their red deeds."
 "Gold is what we are after, not blood, though we are often forced to kill to get it."
 "But to the captain?"
 "Yes?"
 "If he is going to play us false, than I would like to know it."
 "How can you find out?"
 "I wish to know just what your views are, and where the train is going."
 "Then I can head him off, for he shall not have that pretty girl to make her life wretched."
 "It is to your credit to say so."
 "I intend to marry her myself."
 "Ah! that is it?"
 "Yes, but by fair, not foul means."
 "I see."
 "I am called a handsome fellow, and I am not so bad at heart."
 "I've got a little plunder saved up, so I intend to go to her home, make up to the girl and marry her."
 "And the captain, Lasso Luke?"
 "Well, if you will tell me how to catch him trying to run off with the girl, I will not only spare your life but I'll turn Lasso Luke over to you as a gift."
 "I accept the terms, pard."
 "The girl is your game, and Lasso Luke is mine," was the prompt and earnest response of Devil Dick.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DEVIL DICK'S COUNTERPLOT.

THE man who had figured as an officer of the army was not over twenty-six, and had a face that was not yet stamped with evil, though wicked he was.
 A petted youth, he had spent his own fortune, then squandered his poor mother's all, and rather than go to work, forged the name of a rich uncle to get a "raise" with which to skip the country.
 He had been a West Point cadet for a couple of years, and was dismissed as incorrigible, so that he had had considerable of a military training, and was posted in army affairs.
 His forgery was detected before he realized on it, and his uncle, to get rid of him, gave him a thousand dollars and told him to leave the country or go to jail.
 He preferred to travel and turned up in Texas, got plundered by the Invisibles, and joined their band as an easy mode of making a living.
 He had risen to be the camp commander of the twenty men who comprised the band, and Lasso Luke, the captain, had perfect confidence in him.

With the men, Officer Herndon was most popular, and he could have executed his captain by giving the order, so that he knew just what his power was, and what he could do if it came to a suspicion that the chief was playing them false.
 Herndon had fallen desperately in love with Ruth Redmond at sight.
 He almost immediately vowed that he would win her, if he had to change his entire life to do so, and he was glad to learn that she was a prospective heiress.
 Lasso Luke had ordered him ahead to the Middle Ford to await the coming of the train, and told him coolly to put the prisoner, Devil Dick, to death, when they should halt for the night.
 That the young outlaw officer did not obey the last order, has been seen; but he was on his way to the Middle Ford, when he decided to see what he could discover from Devil Dick about his captain, and if there was not a chance for them to come to some terms together.
 When they halted for a rest, the officer at once freed the hands of his prisoner, with the remark:
 "You see that I trust you."
 "I am under obligations for it."
 "Now the question is, can you help me circumvent Lasso Luke?"
 "I think so."
 "How?"
 "To which ford did he direct you to go?"
 "The Middle Ford."
 "With how many men?"
 "The band."
 "Those with you?"
 "I have more."
 "Within call?"
 "Well, within call of a spot we pass upon our way to the ford."
 "And then?"
 "We were to disguise ourselves as Comanches, rush in upon the camp, and kill the outfit."
 "He said all?"
 "Yes."
 "He did not mean it."
 "That is what I fear."
 "He does not mean to sacrifice Miss Redmond."
 "I am sure of that."
 "Then he will have fled with her?"
 "Sure."
 "And you do not intend to massacre the train?"
 "Not a soul of them, for I wish to win the girl, and become a hero in her eyes, so my plan was to dash in with my soldiers, you see, rescue the train, and make myself solid all round, for the balance of the men would make a feint of an attack as Indians."
 "That is a good plot, only the girl would not be there."
 "I believe you."
 "She would have been kidnapped by Lasso Luke, and you would not be able to shine as a hero in her eyes."
 "You are right; but what am I to do?"
 "Lasso Luke said the Middle Ford?"
 "Yes."
 "That means that he will send the wagon-train that way?"
 "Yes."
 "He told you its camping-place?"
 "Yes, in Snake Valley."
 "Well, as you seek my advice, and offer me terms, I am willing to help you."
 "Do so, and you have your life."
 "If Lasso Luke sent the train to Middle Crossing, it is sure that he would not be there."
 "Yes."
 "So the place to catch him is to head him off at Prairie Crossing, or the Hills Crossing."
 "You have a level head."
 "Now, with the girl in his power, and the heiress of that mine, he will not care to return to the band of Invisibles again."
 "I see."
 "He will wish to be considered killed with the others, and he will, he thinks, bring Miss Redmond to terms, and take her to Hard Times City as his wife, where he can get her fortune there in the Soldier's Mine."
 "You are on the right trail, Devil Dick."
 "Now, my idea is that he will cross the Prairie Ford with her, though he may go by the Hills Crossing, and your plan is to go to the former in person, with a couple of your soldiers, while, if you trust me with the other two, I will go to the Hills Crossing."
 "If I catch them there, give me Lasso Luke and you shall have the girl."
 "And I'll do it."
 "But the train?"
 "Well, I suppose I will have to plunder it."
 "Now that train belongs to three poor men,

and their families, and you would get but little, as I know.

"Mr. Redmond is on his way to take charge of the ranch left by his brother to his daughter, for Ruth is the niece of the one with the train, and it is from her own father she will get her inheritance of the Soldier's Mine, of which she knows nothing, nor does her uncle."

"The others are Mr. Harris and his brother, both poor men, going to divide a ranch and cattle they bought from a kinsman who went back to his old home to die."

"So you would not be repaid for the trouble."

"Well, I'll take you at your word, and let the train go, not calling out the balance of the band, especially as I do not care to have them know about the soldier's daughter whom I am to win and marry."

"You'll win the sooner by taking my advice, and rescuing her from Lasso Luke."

"But about my being a soldier?"

"Well, you can tell her you were on Lasso Luke's trail, whom you knew as a leader of outlaws, and it was all a plot to capture the whole band."

"You are my friend," said the young outlaw earnestly extending his hand.

"I hope I may believe that you are my friend, for I have no desire to die at the hand of your captain."

"I'll prove my friendship."

"How?"

"You shall go with two of my men to the Hills Crossing to head off the chief if he goes that way."

"Well, we should lose no time in getting to our posts."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CAPTIVE LEADER.

THE outlaws and their prisoner had an early dinner together, and the young leader told his men that he had reason to believe that their chief meant to play them false and run off with the pretty girl whom they had seen in the train camp.

The train he also said was of little value, and they would let it go by, while they divided their force and headed off the chief in his treachery, for that he was a traitor to them they understood when Devil Dick explained how he had led the trains into the hands of the Comanches, instead of his own men, just so he could get possession of the girl.

Attached to their young officer, and caring nothing for their chief, who was so seldom with them, the four men agreed to divide, two going with Devil Dick.

Those two were quietly ordered to keep an eye upon their man, for though he was to go in bonds he yet might get away.

"If he catches the chief with the girl, or I do, so that it is his plan that wins, I will set him free; but you watch him close, men, and if he attempts to escape you must kill him rather than allow him to do so."

Such were the orders given the two men who were to accompany the prisoner.

Devil Dick suspected their instructions, but he was not in the least disturbed.

He rode his own horse, and his own weapons were tied fast to the saddle; but what use were they to him when his hands were bound behind his back, and his feet fast under the animal.

"Well, Devil Dick, I go to the Prairie Crossing, and I hope to head Lasso Luke off there."

"You go to the Hills Crossing for the same purpose."

"I will know where to find the train if Lasso Luke does not cross below, and I will go to it, sending one of my men to tell you where to find me, if you too fail to find him at the upper crossing."

"Should you capture him, send after me at once."

"I understand, sir."

"Of course you must not fret because I do not set you free."

"Oh, no!"

"If you come in sight of the man and the girl, my men will set you free to give you a chance."

"Yes."

"Now, hoping for luck, I will say good-by."

Thus they parted, and Devil Dick rode on his way, one of his guards ahead, the other behind him, the former holding the lariat of his horse.

A strange expression rested upon the face of the prisoner, as he rode along, called there by musings, which were as follows:

"Now, I am really sure that Lasso Luke will

run off with the girl and leave the train to be wiped out, as he has planned, by his men.

"He may hang on to effect a pretended rescue, to curry favor, though I doubt it.

"He will never take the Prairie Crossing, whither I sent that young fool, for he will know better; but he will cross either at the Middle Ford or the Hills.

"If the former, he will then have to come up upon the other side of the river and join the trail from the Hills Crossing, so in either case I have got him.

"It seems ridiculous to a man bound as I am, to talk about rescuing Ruth Redmond, but I have it in my power to free myself when a chance occurs, thanks to that tiny pair of sharp scissors she slipped into my hand when she bade me farewell, and which I have safe in the lining of my sleeve, within reach of my fingers.

"I love the girl, and I shall win her, in spite of my formidable rivals, Lasso Luke and Herndon."

So mused the prisoner as he rode along, and all unconscious of the plotting and contemplating of the man in their charge, the two guards went serenely on their way.

They saw no reason for haste, so took their time most leisurely, and it was three o'clock before they drew near the river.

The land had become wild, rugged and mountainous, and it seemed the very country for the rendezvous of a band of outlaws.

Having learned from the young leader of the outlaws, something of the manner of working of the band known as the Invisibles, Devil Dick could very readily understand how they kept themselves out of the way of the Rangers and Regulators who had so persistently hunted them.

"Well, if I catch Lasso Luke I will be in great luck, and if I rescue from him Ruth Redmond, then my destiny is sealed.

"But I can then strike a blow at the Invisibles through one of their innocents here with me, for the one I don't have to kill must betray his comrades or hang.

"As for Herndon, he shall have a chance to get away, and he had better take rapid advantage of it.

"Ah! here we are nearing the river, and we must cross to the other shore and go into hiding, for then we can head off Lasso Luke, should he cross at the Middle Ford ahead of the train, as he must follow the trail up the river-bank.

"Come, pard, the other shore is where we take our stand," and the three rode down into the river, for though a prisoner, Devil Dick was the leader.

CHAPTER XXV.

A PAIR OF SCISSORS.

ACROSS the deep and swiftly flowing river the three horses made their way, the two guards refusing the request of the prisoner to have his hands set free, in case his horse should fall with him.

"Drownin' is an easy death they tells me," said one.

"Yas, and ef yer dies, I guesses we kin do the work better without you," said the other.

"Ah! you don't like my being a prisoner and captain too?"

"Well, I'll take the chances, men, and if I do get drowned I will haunt you, that is all."

They flinched at this, but determined to prevent being haunted by taking better care of their prisoner.

So they rode upon either side him all the way across.

The prisoner directed them to a place to lie in ambush, and examining the trails they saw no fresh hoof-mark.

"He has not passed yet," muttered the prisoner.

The place selected was a small canyon, from the mouth of which any one could be seen crossing the river or coming up from the shore trail.

The horses were turned loose to feed, bridled and saddled, as they could not stray, and one of the men went on watch, while the other sat down near the prisoner.

They talked together for awhile and then Devil Dick began to nod.

It was a warm afternoon and the solitary guard followed his example and was soon leaning back against a tree fast asleep.

Then the prisoner's fingers were put to work.

They felt in a hole in the inner cuff of his hunting jacket and drew out a pair of small scissors with sharp points.

They were at once set to work, with the thumb and forefinger of the right hand, at the lariat around the wrist of the left hand.

Strand by strand was cut until at last the left hand was free.

Then the scissors were taken on the left thumb and finger, and the right hand was freed, both being still held behind the back.

But soon they were brought around and the sharp scissors worked rapidly upon the lariat bands about the ankles.

These too were soon free while the guard slumbered peacefully on.

To attempt to reach him and secure a weapon from his belt was dangerous in the extreme.

So the only chance lay in reaching his own horse feeding thirty paces away.

To do this he might be seen by the guard at the entrance to the canyon a hundred yards distant.

But Devil Dick arose without a sound, stealthily crept toward his horse and reached his side.

His rifle and belt of arms were tied fast with his lariat to the cantle of the saddle.

He again used his little scissors, and a few minutes more placed him in possession of his weapons.

He quickly strapped on his belt, and crept back toward his sleeping guard and again slipped into his place, putting the lariat over his feet to have them appear still bound.

Then he put his hands behind him; but one held a revolver.

The expression upon Devil Dick's face was a study.

He enjoyed the situation hugely, and was anxious for the outlaw to awake.

At last he did so, and, with a start, gazed at his prisoner, as he believed him to be.

Devil Dick wished to avoid any outcry.

He did not care to kill the man, and did not wish a pistol-shot heard, for the other outlaw, if not brave enough to stand and fight, might fly and tell Lasso Luke all.

Then, too, Lasso Luke might be near enough to hear a pistol-shot.

"You have had a good nap, pard," he said.

"I hain't been asleep nuther," was the response, with the ready lie people always have who have been caught napping and never wish to own up.

"Oh! I thought you had."

"No!"

"Now I'll bet you ten dollars you have."

"How'll yer prove it?"

"I'll leave it to you."

"Done."

"Make it fifty."

"Agreed."

"Put up your money."

"Whar is yours?"

"If you win you can put your hand in my pocket and get it."

"It's a go, now prove it."

"Show your money!"

"Oh, I've got it!"

"Here she be," and the man threw down the sum named.

"That is it."

"Now prove I was asleep, pard."

"This proves it," and with the words a revolver came around with a quick movement and covered the man.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WINNING HIS BETS.

If ever there was an astonished man, it was the guard who had made his bet with Devil Dick.

"I have won, pard, so here goes your money, and if you do not wish your life to go too, just obey me."

"What does yer want?"

"Well, I am glad that you will come to terms, for I do not care to kill you."

"Just whistle for your pard, as soon as I have disarmed you."

He was but a second disarming the man, and then said:

"Now come with me."

The man obeyed and Devil Dick led the way to a hiding-place on the way out of the canyon.

Then he halted and bound him, and then said:

"Call your pard now."

The man whistled and an answer came.

The whistle was repeated and the man on watch came rapidly up the canyon.

"Halt, pard, and hands up!"

Devil Dick had stepped out before him, but the man, though he halted, drew a revolver, and the two weapons cracked together.

The bullet of Devil Dick went where aimed and the man dropped dead.

"He just did miss me."

"I am sorry I had to fire," said Devil Dick quietly, and then he shouldered the dead body

and telling the prisoner to follow went back to the horses.

He made his prisoner secure and said:

"Now I shall go and wait for your chief, for he should be along soon."

"If you do as I tell you, then you go free; but if you refuse, then I shall kill you."

"I'll obey every time, pard, on them terms."

"See that you do," and Devil Dick went forward to go on duty.

He had waited perhaps half an hour when he heard hoof-falls.

Then he saw come in sight two horses with riders.

One was Lasso Luke, the other Ruth Redmond, and the horse of the latter was being led, while a glance showed Devil Dick that the young girl was bound to her saddle.

"I am in great luck," muttered Devil Dick, and waited for their coming.

It had not been the intention of Lasso Luke to kidnap Ruth then.

He had intended to be her pretended rescuer, when his men attacked, and save the train, as it were, and in his own good time force her to marry him.

But her persistent shadowing him had taken her far from her people, and at last he made up his mind to kidnap her, carry her to his retreat, and keep her there until she became his wife, when he would carry her to New Mexico and claim her mine, which he knew of.

So it was that he had caught her off her guard and made her prisoner, and he was upon his way to cross the river to his retreat as he had gone up the further shore, when he suddenly heard the words:

"Hands up, Luke Harber!"

But Lasso Luke resisted, and it was a mistake upon his part, or perhaps it was not, as he might thereby have saved himself from being hanged.

He saw who his foe was, and drew his revolver.

It was a quickly ended duel, only two shots being fired, and Lasso Luke fell dead from his horse.

"Mr. Drummond!" cried Ruth in amazement and joy combined.

"Yes, Miss Ruth, I am Devil Dick."

"And I owe my rescue to you?"

"Oh, no, to your tiny pair of scissors, permit me to say."

"But you shall hear the story another time, for now I must get back to the train and start them by the lower ford."

He went back up the canyon, got the horses, strapped on them the prisoner and the bodies of the dead guard and Lasso Luke, and having rid Ruth of her bonds, led the way back across the river.

Then he went rapidly on to the dividing trails, where the train was still in camp, for they dared not move until the return of the guide, and all were becoming most anxious about Ruth.

When she came up with Devil Dick, the dead bodies and prisoner, all felt how true had been her instinct regarding Lasso Luke, and her father said, quickly:

"Forgive me, my child, for you have been the one to save us."

"We must press on now, sir, for I do not wish to have the Invisibles find us."

"I will ride on ahead, for I have more friends to meet at the Prairie Crossing."

"You go with me, Boxer," and he turned to the prisoner.

So on the train wound along the lower trail, while Devil Dick and his prisoner rode rapidly on ahead.

"You say your name is Boxer?"

"Yas, pard."

"You do not wish to die?"

"I don't."

"You will do as I tell you?"

"Yes."

"Well, do as I say and I'll give you your freedom and the money you got from your dead pard and Lasso Luke, as well as what you may find upon the two men with Herndon."

"Yas."

"I intend to run in on them, and if they don't surrender quickly they must fight."

"I don't mince matters, and I count no odds."

"Are you with me?"

"Yes."

"Then you are to tell me about the trail to the retreat of the Invisibles, and I am done with you."

"I'll do it."

They came in sight of the ford just before sunset, and seeing them coming, Herndon and his two comrades came toward them.

He saw that the prisoner was free, the guard with him, and he supposed that Lasso Luke had

been captured or killed, and he was congratulating himself upon the hope of soon having Ruth Redmond his captive, when loud rung the command, as Devil Dick charged forward:

"Hands up, Herndon, and all of you; for you are my game!"

The young outlaw was so taken aback that he put spurs to his horse and fled without firing a shot, while Devil Dick grappled with his two men.

It was a sharp fight, and Devil Dick's horse went down; but he was upon his feet in an instant, and one of his foes had fallen dead, while the other was wounded.

As for the one to whom he was to give his freedom, he had decided to take no chances and had run away when Devil Dick's eye was turned to his foes in front.

The train came on later and went into camp, and all that could be done for the wounded man Mr. Redmond did; but he died at midnight, after having explained to Devil Dick just how to find the retreat of the Invisibles.

Early the next morning the train crossed the river, and that night the Redmonds spent in their new home, Sunset Ranch, while Devil Dick, refusing to be their guest, went on to the settlements, hunted up a party of cowboys, and rode rapidly toward the retreat of the Invisibles, following the directions given him by the dying outlaw.

CHAPTER XXVII.

OFFERED TERMS.

So unexpected had been the attack of Lasso Luke upon Ruth Redmond, that she was taken completely by surprise, and being caught off her guard, she became the captive of the man whom she had really regarded as in her power.

She did not resist, for she knew that it would be useless, and she said:

"Now that I am your prisoner what do you intend to do with me?"

"I'll secure you first, Miss Redmond, for you are as dangerous as a prairie wolf."

"You must consent to be bound."

"I am not one to offer resistance against brute force," she replied.

"You are wise, and I will simply secure you against escape and playing a treacherous act toward me, for I believe if you got the chance you would kill me."

"Nothing would please me more, for I do not believe my conscience would hurt me in the slightest degree at removing a man so vile as you are from life."

"Well, you shall not get the chance," was the answer.

Then Lasso Luke took the lariat hanging at Ruth's saddle-horn, and proceeded to bind her to her saddle and also make her hands fast.

To have dismounted, or escaped would have been impossible for her, and so she accepted the situation with as good grace as possible.

"Now tell me why you have made me your prisoner?" she asked, as the man mounted took the bridle-rein of her horse and led the way on once more.

"You brought it upon yourself."

"How so?"

"Well, you would not believe the statement of Lieutenant Herndon, that I was an honorable man and Devil Dick a traitor, and so followed me."

"My doubt proves to have been correct by the manner in which you have now acted toward me."

"Well, you shadowed me, so to speak."

"You watched me on post all last night, and—"

"It was because I believed you would betray the camp."

"Do you still believe so?"

"I am sure of it now."

"Why do you doubt me?"

"In the first place, I flatter myself that I am a good reader of the human face."

"You must know that I was born in a frontier fort, and brought up among men."

"Until I was in my teens I was among the officers, soldiers, scouts and hangers-on about the fort, and so I became a student of human nature, and enjoyed it."

"When my father died, and I went into civilization to live, at my uncle's home in Alabama, I had a better chance to associate with women, and people not connected with the army, and still I kept up my study of my sex and yours."

"I was sent to boarding-school in Mobile, and I assure you I made very few mistakes among my fellow-pupils as to their character."

"Some of the girls with the faces of an angel were at heart devils, and some who would not

win love by their countenances, were noble-hearted."

"Then we decided, after I left school, and my uncle met with reverses, to come to Texas to live on the ranch my father left me."

"I urged it, because I believed my uncle could do well and redeem his fallen fortunes."

"You became our guide, and all of the party trusted you implicitly."

"More than any one else, I knew how important was the position you held, how much depended upon it, and that you could destroy us all if you were so inclined."

"So it was that I began to study you."

"I rode with you in the lead, seemed to seek your society until you, a good-looking fellow and conceited, began to feel that I was dead in love with you."

"Somehow, from the first I distrusted you, and the more I studied your character, the more I felt that you were a villain."

"That is a harsh term to use to me."

"It is scarcely so harsh as you deserve."

"I felt that you were at heart treacherous, and somehow I began to feel that you had joined the train for other reasons than simply the pay to be gotten as a guide."

"I noticed that you shunned observation on the march, kept away when strangers visited our camp on Sundays, and we neared the settlements."

"The moment I spoke of Devil Dick, as you called Mr. Drummond, as a handsome, brave man, you abused him shamefully."

"My opinion of you was proven not to be wrong, when you suddenly asked me to be your wife, and when I refused, abused me in every manner you could."

"Then you threatened me, and now you know just why I doubted you, and I ask what your intention is regarding me, now you hold me your captive."

Ruth Redmond had spoken in a quiet, easy tone, but in deadly earnest.

She had watched the man's face as she spoke, and in fact studied the effect of her words.

What would be the outcome of his making her a prisoner she could not even guess at; but she was of a fearless nature and would not weaken until all hope was gone.

The response to her question, as to his intention regarding her, he replied:

"I will tell you, and listen well to what I say."

"I certainly shall."

"You have said that I was not a bad-looking man."

"Yes."

"I am not deformed."

"No."

"I have an education above the average, and I am a Texas frontiersman, and I have heard you say you admired men of that class."

"I do, honest, able fellows, brave and generous-natured."

"Well, you believe me to be a scoundrel?"

"I do."

"Now I am not, and you have read me wrong."

"I doubt it."

"I love you with all my heart, and if I can prove to you that you are wrong, will you become my wife?"

"Not emphatically I say, no!"

"Why not?"

"I could never marry a man I despise and I hate, despise, abhor you."

"You love Devil Dick."

"You think so?"

"I know so."

"What if I did?"

"You should never become his wife!"

"See here, for what motive have you made me a prisoner?"

"To carry you into Mexico with me and have a Mexican priest I know there, unite us."

"Then I will restore you to your home and prove by my devotion and life that I love you, that you wronged me."

Ruth paled at his words, for she knew that a Mexican priest might be found to unite them, no matter how she urged against it, and so she said:

"See here, Lasso Luke, let us see if we cannot come to terms."

"Well, what have you to offer?"

"Very little, for I am poor; but I have a few hundreds in gold saved up and I will buy my freedom with it."

"No, you can only buy your freedom by becoming my wife."

"Consent to this and I will send you at once, as soon as the ceremony is over, to your home under a safe escort."

"After a year I will come to you and prove that I am a true man, that I love you, and ask for your respect and love in return."

"Will you do this?"

Ruth was in a quandary, and her good sense felt that she must make terms with a man she now knew to be the blackest of villains.

If she did not consent, he could, by bearing her into Mexico, force her to become his wife.

If she consented to a marriage, on the conditions named, she could escape from him for a year and in that time find some means to free herself from such a hateful alliance.

So she said:

"Give me time to think, and then I will decide whether I will accept the terms you offer, Lasso Luke."

"You shall have plenty of time, and meanwhile I will take you to the camp of some friends of mine in the mountains, and where you will be perfectly safe."

"I can but go, for I am at your mercy; but I knew not that there were any camps near here."

"There is one."

"Of outlaws, I suppose."

The man's face flushed and he gave her credit for being a very good guesser.

And so they went on their way straight into the trap which Devil Dick had arranged to carry out for the rescue of Ruth Redmond and the capture of Lasso Luke, and of which the treacherous man and his fair captive little dreamed.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FUGITIVES.

BOTH Officer Herndon and Boxer seemed to be of the same opinion that many a soldier has had, namely:

"That he who fights and runs away,
Lives to fight another day."

Boxer stood not upon the order of going, but went at once, and he made tracks, or his horse did, as fast as possible, his desire being to get all the distance possible between himself and Devil Dick.

He had intended keeping faith with the man who had been his prisoner, and who had so cleverly turned the tables upon him.

He had intended to do so for two reasons, for he wished to get the benefit of the pickings he would receive from his outlaw companions, after Devil Dick had either killed, wounded, or taken them prisoners.

He knew that Herndon always carried a belt well filled with gold with him, for fear of accidents.

Then he was aware that the two men with him were pretty well supplied with funds, and he happened to have with him a snug little sum of his own.

The pickings from his dead comrade and Lasso Luke his chief, Devil Dick had promised him, so that he should feel that he was really rich, and muttered to himself:

"I guess I'll have enough to invest in business and lead an honest life, for if I remain here sooner or later I'll get killed, perhaps captured and hanged."

So it was, with the other reason that he was compelled by Devil Dick to aid him in the combat with Herndon and his two men, that Boxer decided to do so.

But when the time came, when he saw Herndon and the two men, and Devil Dick in deadly combat, he decided to get away with all possible dispatch.

If Devil Dick won, he might set him free, and he might not, flashed through his mind.

If Herndon killed Devil Dick, then he, Boxer, would be regarded as a traitor, he would be taken to the retreat and the Invisibles would put him to death by slow torture.

He had better take a certainty for an uncertainty, and so he fled.

He would not dare return to the retreat, for if Herndon, or either of his men escaped from Devil Dick, they had seen him with him as a companion and would report that he set the prisoner free and joined him to hunt them down.

No, he would seek a safer climate than he then believed Texas to be.

And Officer Herndon?

He had been completely taken aback at seeing Devil Dick charge upon him.

It showed him that the man who had been his prisoner came with hostile intent.

He saw Boxer with him, and felt that the other man must be along too.

How had Devil Dick been set free except by the two men left with him, and they had been

led to do so by bribes beyond all doubt, he thought.

As matters appeared against him, that he was fighting Devil Dick and two traitors, as he believed, he decided to let his men fight it out while he sought safer quarters.

So he watched his chance, got a thicket to shelter him and rode off like the wind.

He sped along the trail fearing pursuit, and kept his horse at full speed.

At last he felt that he was safe and paused to rest his tired horse.

He was evidently troubled, for his prisoner had played him false.

Whether his chief, Lasso Luke, had kidnapped Ruth Redmond or not he could not tell, and he gritted his teeth with rage at the thought that he would not be able to rescue her.

He dared not go back to his retreat, as if one of the men who remained to fight Devil Dick escaped he would tell the Invisibles that he had deserted them in their sorest need and he would at once have his power over them, and perhaps be shot for a coward.

Then too if Boxer had turned traitor, and it certainly looked as though he had done so, he would guide Devil Dick and the men of the train to surprise the retreat of the Invisibles and thus all would be killed or captured.

With a belt about his waist containing his worldly fortune in gold, Herndon decided to seek another abiding-place than the Texas frontier.

He had to give up the hope of winning Ruth Redmond, for he had a wholesome fear of Devil Dick, and that man would without doubt go back to the train as guide.

As for his chief, Lasso Luke, he knew not what his fate had already been, and he feared that he might cross his path in some way he was unprepared for, and thus trouble follow.

After mature deliberation Herndon decided upon his future course.

He would disguise himself as best he could and find out if Ruth Redmond had been captured by Lasso Luke.

If so he would give up all hopes regarding her.

But if not, if she went on to her ranch home, then he would go to Mexico, wait a certain time until he could grow his beard and hair long, and thus disguised, return and try and win her, keeping an eye the while for Devil Dick who might appear, he feared, as his rival.

Then another thought of a plan flashed into the mind of Herndon.

This was to go to the mines, where was the lead of Ruth Redmond, and await there as a miner.

If Lasso Luke had kidnapped her to make her his wife, it was to her mine that he would surely bring her.

If Devil Dick decided to tell her of her being an heiress, then she would naturally go there to her mine, if she escaped Lasso Luke.

So he again changed his plan, and deciding to go to the mine, turned his horse about and started for New Mexico.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SHOTS IN THE DARK.

HERNDON rode on his way most cautiously.

He was anxious to avoid meeting any danger whatever, for he had been considerably unnerved by the turn affairs had taken.

He had seemed so sure of having all go to please him at first, and had builded up his future upon his success, and missing Ruth Redmond and her fortune, that when he discovered that his prisoner was not only free, but attacking him, and Boxer, and the other man, as he believed, traitors, it took him wholly aback.

Now as he rode along he was looking for a good camping-place for the night.

He loved his comfort, catered to his appetite, and whenever he could do so, secured good quarters for himself.

Remembering a secure camp up a canyon, some miles on ahead from where he then was, he decided to go there, though it would be after nightfall before he arrived.

But he knew the camp well, and there was ample wood, water and grass near.

Night came on, and yet he continued on his way.

At last he entered the canyon, and riding around a thicket, came full upon a little blaze, a fire just kindling.

Before he could wheel his horse a man confronted him, and instantly two shots rung out in the darkness.

Down from his saddle dropped Herndon, and the man he had surprised building a fire, also fell at the shot of the outlaw officer.

Herndon's horse trotted off a short distance and began to feed.

There lay the two men where they had fallen, and from the lips of Herndon came a deep groan of agony, for he had been hard hit.

Was it an echo? He heard from over beyond the fire another groan.

Had he killed his foe or only wounded him?

"My God! I am dying!"

"This is to be my end!"

"Here am I to die—to die!"

"Oh, Heaven, have mercy upon me!"

The last words were conscientiously uttered in a loud, fervent tone, wrung by despair and physical anguish from the lips of the man.

And then from beyond the fire came the response:

"Amen! Yes, I say amen to that prayer, pard, for I, too, need Heaven's mercy upon me, a guilty man."

Herndon started and gazed toward the speaker.

The fire had kindled brighter and brighter, and was now growing into a bright blaze.

It illumined the darkness of the spot, revealing a canyon, with the fire blazing in it and the two men lying some thirty feet apart.

"My God! it is you, Boxer!" cried Herndon.

"Yes, pard, and your shot has done me up, I guesses."

"As I fear your shot has killed me."

"I was a-campin' fer ther night, and had jist lit ther fire when I seen yer ride up."

"I thought you was a enemy, so I fired, as you did."

"Boxer?"

"Yes."

"I am badly wounded."

"So be I."

"I fear that I may die, and if I do, I wish you to swear to do my bidding."

As Herndon spoke he staggered to his feet and tottered toward his companion in crime.

But his strength failed him, and he sunk down by his side.

"Boxer," he said, after a moment's rest.

"I know that you set the prisoner, Devil Dick, free, but this is no time to upbraid now."

"I believe that I am dying, and in my belt I have gold, and certain papers which I wish to have delivered to one whose name and address you will find with them."

"Will you do this for me?"

"If I lives, Pard Herndon, I will do it."

"You mean it?"

"I does."

"By your hopes of hereafter?"

"Yes, I does."

"I am content, for these papers will aid those I have wronged, and you can tell them that I was killed and you were with me when I died."

"Yes; but, pard?"

"Well?"

"If I dies and you gits well I wishes you to do as much for me."

"I will."

"Yer see, I is one who stands in the way of a deserving man getting a fortin."

"If it's known I is dead, he can git it, and I has papers here ter prove thet I are ther man."

"Them papers I wish you to deliver to ther name on 'em, and you can tell thet you seen me die, only don't say we was sich fools as ter kill each other."

"No."

"And don't say as how we was outlaws."

"No, indeed."

"Well, yer'll do it fer me?"

"I will, if I live; but I fear I will die."

"I has ther same feelin'."

"Well, I'll turn over to you my belt and papers."

"Here they are."

He took off the belt as he spoke and feebly handed it over to his companion.

"And I'll tarn mine over to you, pard."

This Boxer did.

Then Herndon asked:

"Tell me, Boxer, did Lasso Luke come by the ford when you waited for him with the prisoner?"

"He did."

"And the girl was with him?"

"She were."

"Ah me!" and the wounded man sighed deeply.

"And did you recapture the girl?"

"That terror Devil Dick did it all."

"He did?"

"Yes."

"But how?"

"Awful easy."

"But he was bound hands and feet."

"Yas, but the gal, when she shook hands with

him, slipped a pair of scissors into his grip, and he jist sawed the lariats loose with 'em, and won a cool hundred from me, ter boot."

"Then he talked me inter his way o' thikin', laid fer my pard, kilt him, and then jist had it out with Lasso Luke when he come along with ther gal."

"He did all this?"

"Yas, and were ter go arter you, and I hed ter go along, too; but I levanted when I seen my chance, and you got away it seems, and we two meets here in ther dark and kills each other jist like ther darned fools we is."

Herndon made no reply, and after a few moments Boxer spoke to him again.

Still no response, and the man glanced quickly toward his comrade, while hoarsely from his lips came the words:

"My God! he is dead!"

And in his horror at the scene, Boxer attempted to rise, but he fell back, for he was too weak to walk, and with a groan of anguish and sorrow cried:

"And I, too, must die!"

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCLUSION.

FOLLOWING the trail to the retreat of the outlaws was no easy task by night, so that Devil Dick halted his force of twenty gallant cowboys until morning.

Then they pressed on, and to their delight discovered that neither the young officer, Herndon, or the outlaw, Boxer, who had run away, had gone near the retreat, so that it was a complete surprise to the Invisibles to see the Texans come dashing in upon them.

The manner in which they hunted cover and found it, and managed to escape, showed that they well deserved the name of *Invisibles*.

But several were killed, a few wounded and captured, and the Texans fared well in the plunder they secured from the retreat.

On the march back from the attack upon the Invisibles' retreat, Devil Dick, who was leading, and some distance in advance, halted suddenly on the trail.

There before him was a burned-out camp-fire, and near it lay two dead men.

One of them was his escaped ally, Boxer, and the other was Herndon.

He understood that they had met there and killed each other, and more he did not care to know.

But he saw by the side of each belts heavy with gold, and these he appropriated to his own use, before the coming up of his own men.

When the party came up the bodies were buried, and their arms appropriated.

Not far away their horses were found, one staked out, the other feeding with saddle and bridle on.

And so two more of the band of outlaws were accounted for.

The trail then led by the houses of Thomas and William Harris, and also Sunset Ranch, and this last exploit of Devil Dick proved that he was not the man Lasso Luke accused him of being, but the one who had been the friend of the train people through all.

As for Ruth Redmond she smiled in triumph at her victory, that she alone had been the friend of Richard Drummond against the attacks of all the others, and she was compelled to admit to herself that her heart was not longer in her keeping.

With her to love was to give her whole soul, and it mattered not to her that the object of her affection was known as a desperate character, had the lives of a score of men upon his hands, and had won, by his terrible deeds, the name of Devil Dick.

She only knew that he had saved her life, and saved her from more than death, and he had won her love.

Handsome, fearless, courtly, well-educated and gentle as a woman in his manners, deadly as death to his foes, she loved him with all the passions of her nature, and she only hoped that her love was returned.

One day, months after her arrival at the ranch, Devil Dick visited her there.

He sought her out and told her that he loved her.

He told her that he had never been a good man, that he was little better than an outcast, but for her sake he would change his mode of life, if she would promise to become his wife.

Gladly she gave the promise, and then he told her how her father, long years before, had taken an interest in a mine in New Mexico with several brother officers.

It was known as the Soldier's Mine, and it panned out so little that one by one the others sold out to her father, and he became sole owner and put it in charge of a man to run it upon shares.

He had never had a dollar from it, so had forgotten its existence.

But the man Marks, an honest fellow, at last struck it rich, and now he had a very handsome fortune laid by for the heiress, Ruth Redmond, awaiting for her to claim it.

Devil Dick was not a man whom Mr. Redmond and his wife would have sought for the husband of their adopted daughter; but Ruth was in love, and she had an iron will, and so they gave their consent, and there was a wedding in Sunset Ranch.

And the young bride went with her husband to claim her fortune in the mine.

There it was awaiting her, a very large fortune indeed.

And the sight of the gold, all placed in his keeping, brought out once more the evil in the nature of Richard Drummond, and he began to gamble, to drink, and abuse his beautiful bride.

For a long while she clung to him until at last in one of his drunken furies he struck her a blow which he believed had killed her, and he fled.

And while she returned with a broken heart to her ranch-home, he became a wanderer.

From bad to worse he went, until at last he had squandered all of her money left in his keeping, and once more he was forced to live by his wits alone, by chance at the gambling table.

As an adventurer he at last became the friend of a rich young Mexican, Ignacio Inglis, whose life he was so fortunate as to save, and, his true character unknown to his new-found friend, he accompanied him to Mexico.

His betrayal of his friendship, taking the life of his Mexican friend in a duel, and kidnapping of Senorita Marion Inglis, to try and force her to wed him, that he might secure her fortune, at last drove him into outlawry, and he became the leader of a desperate band, which he deserted to turn renegade, and became the White Chief of the Comanches.

Such was the wicked career of a man who, with everything to make him lead a noble life, had chosen evil rather than good, and had drifted in the downward path until he could sink no further down; a man loved by a beautiful woman who had sacrificed her life to become the wife of her hero—a hero of the vilest clay, who had given her, in return for her heart, devotion and fortune, only a dishonored name.

THE END.

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